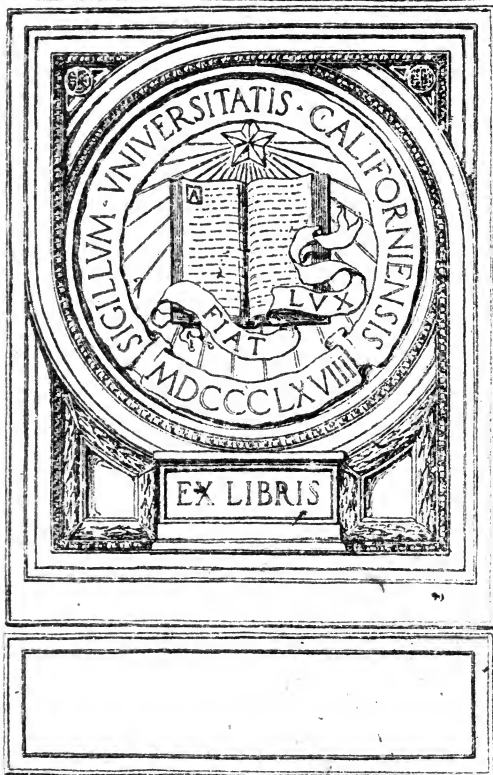


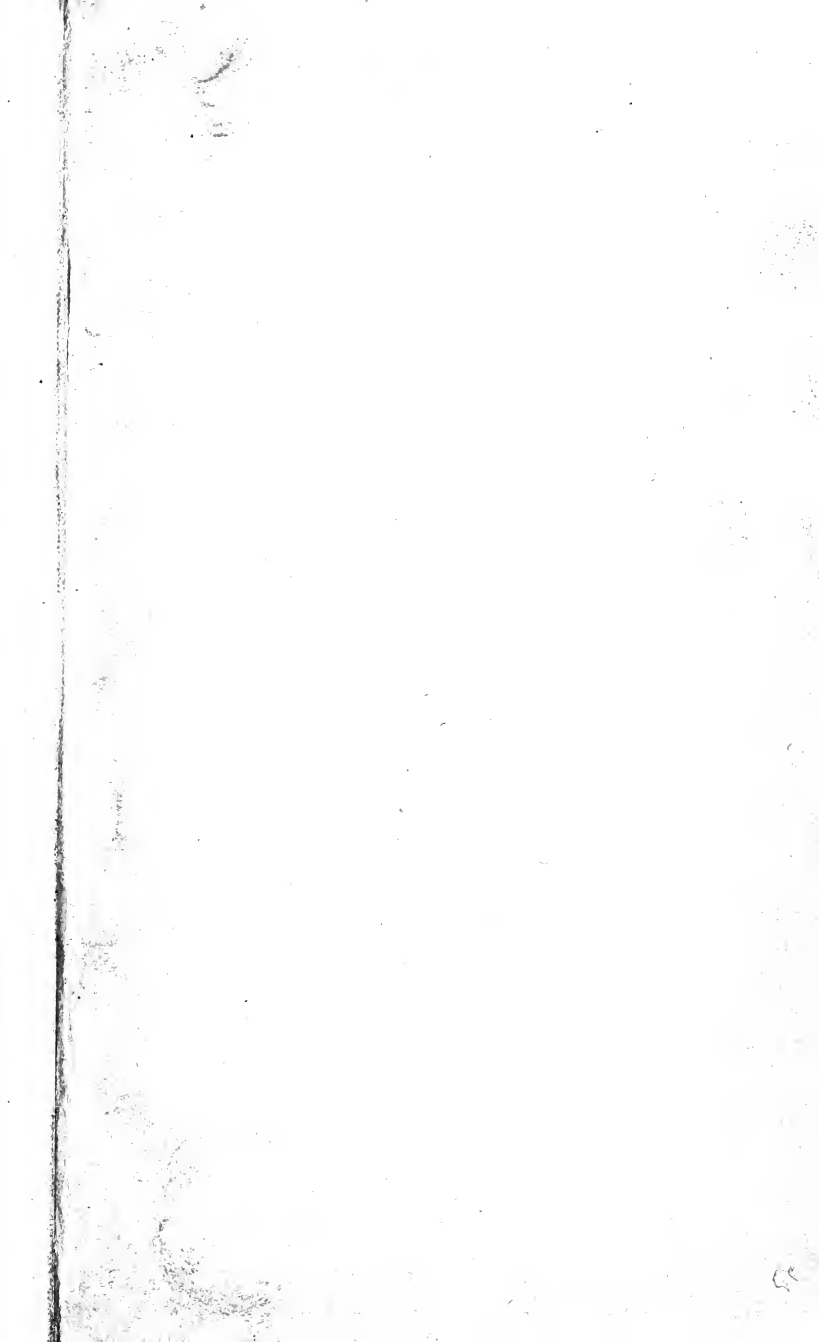
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ZEUS AND HERA (from the Parthenon Frieze)

GREEK LEGENDS

TOLD BY

MARY AGNES HAMILTON



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¹ *From Cults of the Greek States. By L. R. Farnell. (Clarendon Press, 5 vols.)*

CHAPTER I

GODS AND HEROES

IN this book will be found a few of the legends known to every Greek and handed down from father to son, generation after generation, with the help of bards and poets, painters, and sculptors. It is the work of the poets and craftsmen that has preserved for us the great stories of early times, and we want to know the stories not only because they are very beautiful and interesting in themselves, but because the Greek artists have used them, and left us wonderful masterpieces based upon them, and because so much of Greek history and Greek religion is contained in them.

Whenever Greeks gathered together, whether they assembled to celebrate some festival, such as a wedding or a funeral or a service to the gods, or merely met to enjoy food and drink and talk, their chief joy was in the songs and stories of the minstrels. At every such meeting the bard was present. Before the invention of writing, before men knew any way of preserving the stories of their past, either graving on stones or setting down in books, the songs of the bards were the only form of history. Each bard handed on to his children or pupils the stories he himself had sung, and as they in their turn went about the country from place to place, they added to and enriched their lays. In this way the tales grew from generation to generation. New verses were for ever being added: a bit was put in

here, another bit there, to suit each particular district or village.

Soon the craftsmen began to help the bards. They made pictures of the favourite persons and incidents in the lays ; sometimes they carved them in stone ; more often they decorated shields and helmets with them, or the vessels of clay that were used each day in the house.

Thus, although we know none of the stories in their earliest forms, they can still tell us much of what the Greeks themselves believed about their own early history. Out of them Greek art grew up. In painting, sculpture, and poetry, the material comes from the legends ; no one can fully enjoy Greek art unless the stories of the gods and heroes have sunk into his mind. Moreover, the whole world, all the generations that have come after the Greeks, has drawn inspiration from Greek poetry and Greek sculpture, and found there and in the legends which the arts illustrate a source of ever-new beauty. Many of the stories are indeed common to all races, and appear in slightly different forms in north and south, east and west ; but the forms that the Greeks gave them have a wonder of their own.

To the Greeks themselves, however, and to the Romans after them, the legends, of which this book contains a handful, meant more than so many beautiful and fascinating tales. Like the stories in the Old Testament, they contained the early history and the religion of those who listened to them.

As far as the history goes, we know now that only a small portion of the legends in the form we have them can be looked upon as absolutely true. At the same time, they can often help us to come near to what

may have happened, and very near to what the Greeks themselves believed to have happened.

We know now that civilized peoples lived in Crete and on the Trojan mainland five or six hundred years before any recorded history, before the earliest written tales. This we have learned from excavation. Ruins of magnificent palaces, works of art, weapons of an advanced kind, every proof of civilized life, have been dug up: at Troy, for example, six cities have been traced, one on top of the other. But we have little certain knowledge of what happened in the centuries between this buried Greek civilization and the Greek civilization that we know from history and art. There is a great gap, a gap of six hundred years. This gap is filled up by the legends with amazing tales of mighty heroes and tremendous wars. In reality we may guess that it was filled with pretty constant fighting. It was the time of the great wandering of peoples: and the fortress cities on the islands and the mainland must have resisted the barbarian hordes that swept down upon them in wave after wave from the north, until the original dwellers on the soil were dispossessed and overcome by the invaders. The first inhabitants of Greece of whom we know belonged to differing races, according as they dwelt among the mountains or by the shore: but they were all small dark men, and alike in their habits. They all clad themselves in skins when they went out to fight, and carried shields of leather. The invaders, on the other hand, were tall fair-haired blue-eyed men, armed with iron weapons, and carrying round metal shields. They brought with them their own speech, their own ways, their own stories, and their own religion. They were the Achaeans. The dwellers on the soil whom they overcame, and over whom they

ruled, although they did not drive them out, were the Pelasgians. Now the stories we know are all Achæan stories: the history they record is their history: the religion is the religion they brought with them and set up above the beliefs of the old Pelasgians.

For, as has already been said, few of the legends in the shape in which we know them, belong to the very early age of Greece. They have come down to us only in the form that was given them first by the most famous of the bards, Homer and Hesiod, and second, by the great poets who wrote four or five centuries after Homer, in the great age of Greek history. Hesiod and Homer themselves come late in the history of religion. They tell us little about the beliefs of the earliest inhabitants of Greece, nor can we take their religion as being quite that of the ordinary man of their own day or later, for the ordinary man still held to many primitive ideas and vague beliefs of which Homer says nothing. Religion existed in Greece before the Achæans came with their gods, and that same worship went on existing long afterwards, side by side with the new gods, in the mind of the ordinary man. We have to remember this, in order to understand some things about the gods as they appear in the legends, that strike us as strange.

The Pelasgians, like most very primitive peoples, believed that mysterious spirits were all about them. At first these spirits had no form: soon they began to think they dwelt under the earth and in all the natural objects men saw about them: in trees and stones, in running water, in the rocks and the soil on which they trod. Many of the spirits were angry, fearful things, never named or clearly known: but there were good spirits too. The bad spirits could be kept away and

the good made more friendly, by offerings and prayers, rendered in certain places. So while they feared the chill night, and all the things of night and darkness and the underground world, men worshipped the clear sky and the sun which gave light and warmth. They prayed to the earth to bring forth fruits and crops in due season; and those among the mountains or by the sea prayed to the winds to give them fair weather. Thus, gradually, although the spirits were nameless, men began to think of some of them in more or less human forms, especially of the good spirits, for the dreaded powers of evil remained shapeless and indescribable. The stones before which people bowed in prayer and worship began to be carved in human shape. Instead of worshipping the stone itself they thought of it as the image, the sign of some good spirit. So when men prayed for wind they began to picture to themselves a wind-god who would blow fair gales if he were pleased with them. Next, names were given to the greater spirits. The earliest names were learned from Eastern travellers and merchants, men from Egypt and Phoenicia, who came to Greece in trading vessels, and spoke of the gods and goddesses to whom they prayed.

Into the midst of these changing beliefs came the Achaeans, and they brought with them their own gods from the north, joyous like themselves, and dwelling not in the chill underground like the nameless spirits of evil dreaded by the Pelasgians, but in the shining sky.

So time passed on, and the great bards found the people of Greece worshipping a crowd of gods, under many different names: gods of the earth and of the sky, of the sea, the rivers and the mountains, gods of war and husbandry, of music and dancing, of love and

hate. What they did then was in course of many generations to weave together stories which were passed on from bard to bard until, in the form which Homer gives them, the crowd of nameless gods has gradually shaped itself into a few commanding figures, known to all by common names and worshipped everywhere as the givers of all good things. At the same time the poets built up a story of how these gods came to rule the world in which men lived, and how that world itself and the men dwelling in it came to be.

The earliest writers whose works have come down to us tell that in the beginning there was chaos: a dark nothingness and confusion, in which the seeds of things were all mingled together. Then chaos parted into night and day, darkness and light, and they, mingling in their turn, created the earth. Then Gaia, for so mother earth, the vast woman goddess was called, mated with Uranus, the heaven overhead, and among their children were the brood of Titans, six sons and six daughters. The Titans were vast, immortal beings of immense strength and supernatural powers. Akin to them, but less in might, were the Cyclopes, enormous men with but a single eye, placed in the middle of the forehead. Fearing lest his children should overthrow his power, Uranus allowed none of them to see the light, but concealed them in the underground depths as soon as they were born. Gaia was enraged to see her children treated thus, and at last she stirred them to revolt against their father under the leadership of Cronus, the youngest, to whom she gave a sickle. With this weapon he wounded his father and thus succeeded in overthrowing his power. Where the blood of the injured Uranus fell upon the ground, giants sprang up, and the mysterious avenging goddesses called the Erinyes. They

were winged creatures in female shape, with snakes entwined in their locks and round their bodies, who for ever after pursued and tormented, even after death, those who sinned against their blood-relations. But from the drops of the gore of Uranus which fell into the sea there was created a goddess of marvellous and adorable loveliness, the most beautiful thing upon the earth. None could look upon her and not love her. Fair breezes bore her to the Cyprian shore, balanced upon a shell. This was Aphrodite, the goddess born of the foam.

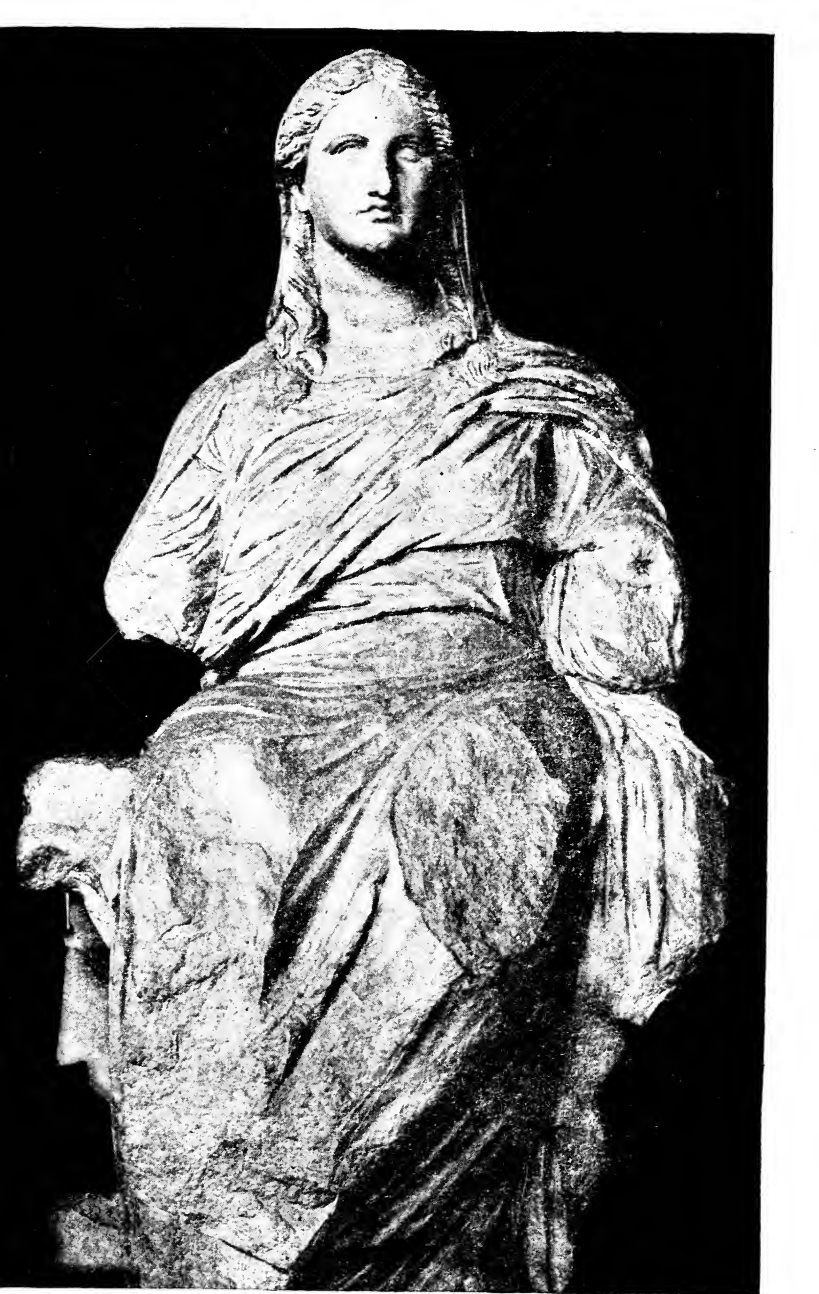
Cronus now ruled in fear, for he had been mysteriously warned that one of his children should be greater than he, and overthrow him as he had overthrown Uranus. One by one he slew his children in the hour of their birth: until when Zeus was born, Rhea, his mother, saved him by putting a stone in his place. Then she hid the infant in a cave on Mount Ida, in the island of Crete, and left him there under the protection of the earth-born demons of the place. They danced round the child, clanging their brazen arms, so that his cries might not come to the ears of Cronus.

When Zeus grew up he was mightier than his father. He called his slain brothers and sisters to life, and with them made war upon Cronus and the Titans.

The struggle was long and fierce. Some of the best of the Titans fought on the side of Zeus, for they knew that the new order, under his rule, would be fairer and nobler than that of the savage Cronus; and when Zeus conquered, he rewarded them. Zeus and his brethren took up their seat on Mount Olympus in Northern Thessaly. Long and desperately did the Titans, led by the fierce brood of Iapetus, fight against the Olympians: but at last they were defeated, for Zeus hearkened

to the counsel of Gaia, the earth mother, and called up to his aid those of his kindred whom Cronus had imprisoned under the earth. These were the giants who had sprung from the blood of the wounded Uranus ; and the hundred-handed brethren of the Titans, the Hecatoncheires. By their aid the warring Titans were at last overthrown. Zeus cast them into Tartarus, a place of torment and hideous darkness, which lay as far beneath the foundations of the earth and sea as the earth is below the heavens. Atlas, one of the sons of the rebellious Iapetus, was condemned to stand for ever at the western end of the earth, near to the border of eternal darkness, and bear upon his shoulders the burden of the pillars which held heaven and earth asunder. The fall of Cronus himself was less direful. He was forgiven by Zeus, and though driven out of heaven, reigned over the Islands of the Blest, in the far Western Ocean.

The gods were now supreme rulers of the universe, with Zeus as their leader and lord. His brethren and all the lesser gods looked upon him as the supreme ruler of the universe, the father of all that dwelt in heaven and on earth. He was the strongest and the wisest far. Mount Olympus remained the earthly dwelling-place of all the gods, but some of them had special realms assigned to them. Thus Poseidon was lord over the sea, and had his home there, with Amphitrite his wife ; and there dwelt also old Oceanus, Pontos and Nereus, and the daughters of Nereus, the nymphs of the sea. The underworld, which was the kingdom of the dead, was ruled over by Hades and by Persephone, his wife. She was a daughter of Zeus himself and of Demeter, the goddess who watched over the harvest and fruits of the earth. Hades beheld her, a maid of matchless beauty,



THE CNIDOS DEMETER (British Museum)

plucking narcissi in a meadow, and carried her off to the lower world on his car. Demeter appealed to Zeus to have her child given back, but Persephone had already tasted the pomegranate given her by Hades, and so belonged to the lower world. There, therefore, she must always spend a third of every year, although for the rest of the time she stayed with her mother on the earth. Thus, like the flowers, she came up out of the ground in spring and returned thither when they died away, after blossom and fruit time, at the coming of winter.

Zeus himself was especially lord of the skies. All the changes of the weather, the winds, the clouds, the rains, the thunder and the lightning, came from him. In his hands he held the thunderbolts. Yet Zeus was not an angry god. He was the friend and protector of all men, and more particularly of those who were in any kind of distress. He helped the suppliant and the wayfarer, who addressed their prayers peculiarly to him, and he cherished the life of the home. Victory was given or refused by him. His commands were law. He was the dispenser of justice. Among trees the oak was sacred to him, and among birds the royal eagle.

The lawful queen and consort of Zeus, standing next in order and dignity among the Olympians, was Hera. Near the borders of the earth, where Atlas stood, was a lovely garden, the garden of the gods, guarded by the Hesperides, daughters of the Night. Here it was that Zeus wooed and wedded Hera: and here Gaia caused the trees to put forth wondrous golden apples as a marriage gift for her. Hera was tall and majestic, with beautiful white arms, and large and lustrous eyes. The peacock was sacred to her.

Ares, Hebe, and Hephaestus were the children of

Zeus and Hera. The queen of Zeus had one fault—jealousy—and Ares inherited her quarrelsome temper. He was god of war, and knew no delight save in battle and bloodshed; indeed his joy in fierce contest and slaughter made him hateful to the other gods, and often displeasing to his father. Eros, the son of Ares and Aphrodite, was, like his mother, the special patron of lovers. Hebe, the fair goddess of eternal youth, served as handmaiden when the immortals feasted together, pouring out their nectar into golden cups made for them by the lame god, Hephaestus, the master of fire and every kind of craft. Hera, it was said, was ashamed of the ugliness of Hephaestus, and threw him from high heaven down to the depths of ocean. There for nine years he remained in a subterranean cavern, fashioning lovely works of art in gold and bronze and silver, amongst them a golden throne of exquisite workmanship, which he sent to his mother. Suspecting nothing, Hera sat down upon it, to find herself imprisoned by invisible chains, and held so fast that none could release her. Hephaestus was sent for, but refused to come. In vain did Ares try to force him back. At last Dionysus, the god of wine, made Hephaestus drunk, and in that condition he was conveyed back to heaven.

Dearest to Zeus of all the dwellers on Olympus were Apollo and Athene. Apollo and his twin sister Artemis, the maiden goddess of the forest and the chase, were the children of Zeus and fair-haired Leto, who bore them at the foot of Mount Cynthus, in the island of Delos. Artemis and Apollo alike were armed with the bow and quiver, and Apollo carried the lyre also. They were the special deities who watched over youths and maidens. Light and radiance, in mind as well as body, came from Apollo: he was the god of prophecy and

music, to whom everything ugly and unclean was abhorrent. With the first shot of his bow he slew the dragon Python, a hideous monster that haunted the caves of Parnassus, and guarded the Delphic oracle. His perfect purity and brightness was thereby stained with the dragon's blood, and to cleanse himself he had to withdraw from Olympus for a long period. Even after this Apollo stood especially near to all penitents, and was above all the cleanser and redeemer of sin and sorrow. Some of his purifying gift was inherited by Asclepius his son. When his mother, the nymph Coronis, was slain by the goddess Artemis as a punishment for her unfaithfulness, Apollo snatched the infant Asclepius from the pyre upon which her body was burning, and handed him over to the wise centaur, Chiron, to be brought up. From him Asclepius learned great skill in the healing art. The science he had acquired, added to his own inborn talent, made him so marvellous a physician that he even tried to raise men from the dead, and succeeded. But in doing this he was transgressing one of the unalterable laws of heaven, and Zeus laid him low with the thunderbolts forged for him by the Cyclopes. When Apollo learned the death of his son he was deeply stricken, and in the fury of his anger and his grief he slew all the Cyclopes who had forged the thunderbolts for Zeus. For this sin he was compelled for seven years to serve as herdsman to a mortal, Admetus, a pious king in Thessaly.

Closely akin to Apollo, god of music and of poetry, protector of the Nine Muses, was Athene, goddess of wisdom and the arts. She, it was said, had sprung full armed from the head of Zeus, and ever after she was the sharer of his counsel and his thought. The owl, symbol of prudence and knowledge, was sacred to her.

She was a maiden goddess, and generally appeared in complete panoply, for she was also goddess of war, though not, like Ares, of fierce and bloody battle. All heroic men were dear to her, especially those who showed courage and wisdom, not merely brute force.

Round these, the greater gods, were grouped a great number of lesser ones. Among them Hermes was the patron of merchants, travellers, wayfarers, and those engaged in any kind of game: he acted as the envoy and herald of the Olympians. Zeus was his father, his mother the fair nymph Maia. Hestia, sister to Zeus, presided over the hearth: Iris, the many-coloured rainbow goddess, was the messenger of the gods.

But it must be remembered that just as the gods did not create all things, so neither were they all-powerful. Behind and beyond them all was Fate--a power of which they were all but part, from which their own power was drawn, in as far as they were the sole instruments through which it worked. Generally, the gods ruled because the decrees of Fate were in their hands, and especially in the hands of Zeus; but both the poets and the ordinary Greek saw in Fate the final law that ruled the universe. Even a god, himself immortal, could not save a mortal if his hour had struck. Asclepius, of godlike birth though he was, perished for such an attempt. Three goddesses, the Moirae, were the special guardians of Fate's decrees, in so far as they affected men: and with them went their sisters the Erinyes, who punished those who transgressed, especially those who sinned against blood relations.

All the gods enjoyed immortal life. They knew not disease or suffering. Ageless and deathless they dwelt above the pains and sorrows that afflicted the miserable race of mortal men who had meantime grown up upon

the earth, or, as some said, had been fashioned by the Titans out of clay. These weak and puny beings rejoiced in the triumph of the Olympians, and sought out ways in which they might win their favour. But there was little that they could do, for they knew not the use of fire. Without it they were helpless. In the cold of winter they wrapped themselves up in skins and stayed within their huts, trying to keep themselves warm by preventing the air from penetrating: in the summer they lay basking in the sun; they knew no means of improving their state or making it and themselves less wretched. They could neither cook themselves food nor warm their dwellings; they could not make weapons or any kind of implement. They were altogether cut off from art and science: they had no means of defence against the wild beasts that infested the country. All their strivings were vain, for want of fire.

Their pitiable state moved the heart of Prometheus, one of the Titans, a son of Iapetus, with tenderness, as he looked down upon their forlorn endeavours and the hopeless plight in which they found themselves. He knew that Zeus had planned to make a nobler race of men on earth: for them he reserved the gift of fire. But to Prometheus it seemed that there was something noble, something even godlike, in men as he saw them: he believed that if they only possessed fire they might rise to be as noble as the new race which Zeus intended to take their place. Therefore he resolved to risk the terrible wrath of Zeus in order to assist and save them. From the furnace of Hephaestus he stole a spark of living fire: hid it in a hollow fennel-stalk, and carried it down to earth. When men saw the wonderful red flower springing out of the fennel-stalk they did not know what it was or how to use it, until Prometheus

taught them. He showed how it could give warmth and light, how by its means the hardest metals could be melted, forged, and shaped, and how, with it, men could become masters of nature and lords of all things upon and in the earth, under the immortal gods.

Then upon Prometheus there descended the fierce anger of Zeus, because he had tried to thwart his will and had given to men what Zeus had denied to them. He was bound with fetters of adamant, such as not even the strength of a Titan could break, to a barren rock beside the sea in the wilds of furthest Scythia, a savage and remote land where no men dwelt. And as Prometheus hung there, with no protection either against the sun which beat down on him in summer, or against the pitiless rain and freezing cold of winter, an eagle plucked forth his liver with its cruel beak and fed upon it, sitting on his chest. Nor did his suffering find an end. He was immortal: every night his liver grew again, and every morning the eagle came again and renewed its ghastly meal. So the years passed, and Prometheus hung there. Yet his pride did not bend, nor did he regret the service he had done to men. But as Zeus saw how men grew in strength and wisdom and beauty, how their lives were enriched by means of the fire that Prometheus had given them, his anger abated, and he declared that Prometheus should be set free if one of the immortals were willing to die for his sake. Then Chiron, one of the centaurs, immortal beings, half man, half horse, came to Zeus, for he had been wounded by a poisoned arrow, and the agony of pain that ceased not day or night was more than he could bear. He begged that his immortality might be taken from him, and that he should be allowed to die. Zeus agreed, and Prometheus was set free, and admitted once

more into the fellowship of the immortals. Rightly did the later Greeks, especially the Athenians, pay him honour as the friend and deliverer of man.

Great changes had meantime come over the life of men. Zeus, before he punished Prometheus, sent down a gift which was intended to bring men almost as much difficulty and distress as the fire which Prometheus stole from heaven had brought comfort. Hephaestus was bidden to form out of clay a woman of exceeding beauty, who was then named Pandora, the all-gifted, because each god dowered her with something. Aphrodite gave her a lovely face, Hera a majestic form, Apollo a sweet voice, Artemis a graceful walk, and Athene the arts, wherewith the better to beguile the souls of men. But Hermes added to these good gifts an evil one—the power of lying, flattering, and deceiving; and then he brought to earth the first woman, to be the bride of Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus. When Prometheus saw the woman and the jar which she had brought with her as her dowry, he begged his brother to refuse to take the gifts of Zeus, whose heart he knew was still hard against men. Epimetheus, however, was the man of after-thought: his wisdom always came too late. He was in love with Pandora, and instead of listening to his brother took her as his wife. The gods had bidden Pandora never open the jar, which contained all evil; but she longed to know what was in it, and every day her longing grew greater. At last she lifted the lid, meaning only to peep in. Then to her dismay, out flew evils, diseases, tempers, mistakes, and disasters of every kind, none of which man had known before, and they spread over the earth with incredible swiftness. In vain did Pandora try to press down the lid again and get them back into the jar. It was too

late. All had escaped, vanished like smoke, save one—Hope. Pandora got the lid on again before she could escape. But Zeus was not yet satisfied. He was resolved to create a new and better race upon the earth. So before long time had passed he sent a mighty flood, which swept away all the houses and the haunts of men, and all the people in them, all save one man and his wife—Deucalion and Pyrrha. Deucalion had been warned by his father Prometheus of the coming of the flood, and had, by his advice, built a great chest of wood, in which he and his wife Pyrrha, the daughter of Epimetheus, floated safe above the tide of waters, that rose and rose until all else upon the earth was washed away. Thus it came to pass that these two alone were saved. For after nine days the waters sank and the chest was left high and dry on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. There Deucalion and Pyrrha made sacrifice to Zeus, to whom they rendered thanks for their preservation. But now all their friends, neighbours, and relations were gone, and they were alone in a world empty of people. The loneliness was more than they could bear. Not knowing what to do, they betook themselves to the altar of Apollo at Delphi, and there prayed for knowledge of how the race might come into being again. The mysterious voice of the oracle answered Deucalion, and told him that he and his wife should veil their heads and cast stones behind them, over their shoulders. This they did, and the stones that Deucalion threw became men, and those that Pyrrha threw became women.

The son of Deucalion and Pyrrha was called Hellen, and from him the Greeks got the name by which they called themselves—Hellenes.

Now wherever the Hellenes dwelt, whether in Greece

itself, or on the islands, or on the coasts of Asia Minor and of Italy, they all worshipped Zeus, and, in only less degree than himself, his children. But side by side with this worship many of the older beliefs remained, and thoughts that he had inherited from the far-off Pelasgians clung to the mind of the ordinary man. He still thought that the earth and everything on it was full of spirits, some good, but most evil. Disease was a spirit that flew into a man's mouth; death was another spirit. Everywhere indeed spirits lurked, waiting to spring out upon man and do him harm, unless he could keep them out of the way.

Not only did men still believe in nameless spirits. The lesser gods held their place: the worship of the great Olympians did not altogether oust them. Every little town or village paid especial honours to some local god or demi-god, and believed that prayers at his shrine were more potent than any others. Often he was not a god in the full sense, but a hero. In the Greek mind there was, bound up with their belief in and worship of the gods, a passionate reverence for heroic men. They thought of heroes as standing in some way or other near to the gods. Sometimes they were the children of an immortal and a mortal parent, as when a god or goddess had stooped to love a human being: such were Asclepius, the child of Apollo and Coronis; Perseus, the child of Zeus and Danae; Theseus, the child of Aithra and Poseidon, and many more. Sometimes they were men chosen out by a god for special protection, because of their own worth, their courage or wisdom. In any case the heroes were greater than ordinary men, able to plead with the gods on their behalf, and to be honoured on that account as well as for their own merits and high deeds.

Nearly all the ruling families in the more important towns of early Greece claimed to be descended from Zeus or one of the other gods. Thus Mycenae was ruled over by the children of Perseus; Pylos by the descendants of Aeolus, grandson of Deucalion, who also held sway in Iolcus, Corinth, Orchomenus, and Calydon; the Peloponnese by the Pelopids, who claimed descent through Tantalus from Zeus. Aeacus, another child of Zeus, founded a family which occupied the thrones of Aegina, Salamis, and Phthia. Thebes was ruled over by the children of Cadmus and Harmonia, the latter being the daughter of Aphrodite and Ares.

Not only had many places their own lesser, local gods, some even of the greater gods were peculiarly honoured in certain spots, and held those spots dear.

Thus Ares was especially the Thracian god. He loved the rude savagery of the men of the north, their courage and their reckless lust of battle. High honour was paid him also in Elis and Arcadia, and of course by the Spartans, a nation devoted to war. There young dogs were sacrificed to him.

Aphrodite was so closely connected with Cyprus that she is often simply called the 'Cyprian'. It was in Cyprus that, as the story goes, she stepped new-born from the foam. The Phoenicians who dwelt on the island brought her worship with them when they came with their wares to Greece.

Delos and Delphi were the best-loved seats of Apollo. It was on Mount Cynthus in the island of Delos that he and Artemis, his twin sister, were born. At Delphi he was the chief prophet and mouthpiece of the will of Zeus. Suppliants came thither to be purified of their sins or to learn the secrets of the future from the far-famed oracle.

Hera, queen of heaven, and goddess of marriage and motherhood, was first worshipped in the Peloponnese: there Argos, Sparta, and Mycenae paid her particular honour. Near Argos stood the Heraeum, her most magnificent temple. Next to Hera the Argive women honoured the maiden goddess, Pallas Athene; once every year they took her image and bathed it in the river. Among all the towns in Greece that paid Athene honour, Athens remained her chief seat and sanctuary. The whole city and the whole land was sacred to her, and whatever other gods were worshipped in the different parts of Attica, Athene retained the highest place in them all. No treasure in the city was so precious as the Palladium. This was a superb carven image, which Athene herself was said to have fashioned in representation of Pallas, daughter of Triton, whom she had slain unawares while wrestling with her. It had fallen from heaven and reached the earth at Troy. So long as it remained there, an oracle declared, the citadel of Troy¹ was safe; when the Greeks stole it, the citadel fell. Every year the Athenian youths bore the Palladium down to the sea-shore, bathed it there, and escorted it back to the city with torches and great pomp. The lamp that burned perpetually before the shrine of Athene was held by the Athenians to be a sign of the perpetual life of the city.

A legend greatly cherished in Athens told how in days far beyond any human memory or record, Poseidon, the great god of the sea, who was dear above all other gods to the Ionians dwelling in the islands and on the coast of Attica, had contended with Athene for the possession of the land. The population in Attica was made up partly of men of native Attic birth, partly of

¹ See chapter xi.

Ionian settlers ; there was long strife between the two, and, according to the story, between Poseidon, the Ionian god, and Athene, the Attic goddess. At last the two heavenly beings appeared on the Acropolis, the Athenian citadel, before King Cecrops and his people, and each gave a sign of power. First Poseidon smote the rock with his trident, whereupon a horse instantly sprang forth. Then Athene struck the earth with her lance, and there appeared a plant hitherto unknown in Greece—a spray of that grey-green olive-tree that grew to be the ‘divine crown and glory of bright Athens’. The tree grew as the people gazed at it, sending forth shoots and new plants on every side. Then Cecrops the king decided, amid the acclamations of the people, that Athene had given the greater gift, for he saw that in the olive with its precious oil they had a source of boundless wealth for the future. So it came to pass that Athene was acclaimed the chief guardian of the land. Ever afterwards, however, Poseidon reigned in friendship by her side, only second in honour to herself.

Among those whom the Athenians loved and honoured as nearly connected with their great protectress was Erechtheus. Homer speaks of Athens as being the domain of Erechtheus the high-hearted. The story of that prince’s birth was strange and mysterious. Gaia, the earth-goddess, was his mother, and the lame Hephaestus his father. When he was born he appeared to have partly the form of a serpent, like the strange gods of olden times, and locks that curled in snaky fashion. When the other gods would have slain him, Athene took him under her own care and reared him without their knowledge. Fearing lest he should be discovered when he grew out of babyhood, she hid him in a chest, with a serpent to guard him, and gave the box into the

charge of three of her priestesses, Agraulos, Herse, and Pandrosos ; these maidens, whose office it was to bring fruitfulness to the fields, were the daughters of King Cecrops. Athene enjoined them not to open the chest, but they disobeyed. When they beheld the child with serpent locks and a snake lying entwined about him, they were so struck with horror at the sight, and so full of fear because of the crime they had committed in disobeying the commands of the goddess, that they all rushed madly to the edge of the high cliffs of the Acropolis and threw themselves over the precipice. The serpent escaped into Athene's shield.

Erechtheus grew up, and in time became so mighty a warrior that the Athenians called him to be their king. Sometimes he is called Erichthonius, and the name Erechtheus given to his grandson, who ruled the land in later times. One of the two built for Athene a magnificent temple on the Acropolis—the Erechtheum, the most ancient building in the land. It was there that Athene's own statue stood, before which the perpetually burning lamp was placed, tended by boy-priests. Later on the statue of Erechtheus himself was likewise placed before the temple. It was believed that he had invented the four-wheeled chariot, and that when he died Zeus took him up to heaven and set him in the skies as a star. Ever afterwards the sons of the Athenians worshipped Erechtheus, so Homer tells, and sacrificed bulls and rams to him at certain seasons of the year.

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF THESEUS

IN the fair island of Crete that is set in the sea to the south of Attica, there reigned for uncounted years a famous king, Minos, brother of Rhadamanthus, who acted as judge in the kingdom of the lower world. The mother of Minos and Rhadamanthus was Europa, the sister of Cadmus, king of Thebes. One day Zeus saw her as she wandered in the flowering meads with her maidens, and her exceeding beauty filled his heart with sudden longing. Down he came into the meadow in the shape of a beautiful white bull, caught the maiden up on his back, and bore her over land and sea to the island of Crete. There he left her, to be the wife of the king, and when the king died, Minos, Europa's son, though but a boy, ruled after him. The poet Hesiod says that Minos was the mightiest king of all mortals. Under his rule the people of Crete were highly civilized and skilled in all the arts at a time when the Greeks of the mainland were little more than barbarians. Zeus loved him for his wisdom and sage counsel, and called him his familiar friend. Every nine years Minos would leave his splendid palace at Cnossus and betake him to a sacred cave, which none had ever entered save himself, for its place was hidden from all others. In the cave Zeus visited him, and instructed him in many things: in the making of good laws, in the government of his people, and in the arts of war. The Cretan navy

ruled the seas; its merchantmen brought to Cnossus wealth from all the regions of the earth.

In the beginning Minos had shared the kingship with his brothers, but after a quarrel he drove them away. When they came back with an army he defeated them, by the help of Poseidon, and ruled alone. Wishing to make fitting sacrifice to the gods in thankfulness for his victory, he prayed to Poseidon to send him a bull fair enough for the purpose. In answer to his prayer a wondrously beautiful animal, with a skin of purest white, arose from the sea, swam to the shore, and placed its head under the king's hand. When Minos saw the gentleness of the beast, the beauty of its form, and the snowy whiteness of its coat, he coveted it for his own. Instead of sacrificing it, therefore, he kept it, and slew on the altar of Poseidon a bull from his own herd.

Poseidon was wrathful when he saw how Minos, to whom he had always shown great favour and kindness, grudged him the bull which he himself had sent in answer to the king's prayer: and he took a terrible revenge.

The snowy bull suddenly lost all its gentleness and became mad. In this state it raged up and down the island, and laid the fair fields waste on every side. It was a terror to the homesteads and a danger to all who had to travel by the roads, for with its madness had come a supernatural strength. No relief, however, came to the wretched Cretans until the hero Heracles¹ at last landed on their shores. He had been commanded, as one of the twelve labours he had to perform, to carry off the Cretan bull and bring it alive to Mycenae. He caught the huge creature, swam across the sea on its back, and conveyed it to Mycenae, where he let it go.

¹ See chapter v.

Then after wandering up and down the vales of Greece, the bull settled in the plain of Marathon to waste the substance of the dwellers there.

The punishment devised by Poseidon did not end here. Minos had married, as his second wife, Pasiphae, the daughter of the sun-god. They had two children—a daughter named Phaedra, and Androgeus, a youth of splendid promise, who had sailed to Athens to take part in the great games at the Pan-Athenian festival which had been established there by Aegeus, the aged king of the land. News now came to Minos that the youngest child of his house, the queen's new-born babe, was a monster: a creature with human body and the head and horny hoofs of a bull, terrifying to all that looked upon it.

Even this was not all the grief that Minos had to bear. While he was mourning over the destruction of his land, and what was still more bitter, the disgrace to his royal house, and pondering how he might conceal the monster there from the sight of men, there came to his court an Athenian fugitive. This was a certain Daedalus, an architect and craftsman of matchless skill, who was said to have more cunning in building than any man of his time. Many believed that he had invented an artifice by which men could rise into the air like birds. Daedalus had a nephew, whom he taught. As he grew up the young man showed an aptitude as great as his uncle's: he invented the turning-lathe and the potter's wheel, on which clay vessels of all shapes and sizes could be manufactured. But as his fame increased Daedalus grew more and more jealous, until at last one fatal day he seized him up and threw him from the topmost heights of the Acropolis at Athens. The hapless young man perished, and Daedalus, banished

on pain of death, fled to Cnossus. Minos willingly harboured him, for he loved skilled craftsmen, and promised him employment at court. It occurred to him to ask Daedalus, since he came from Athens, to give him news of what had happened at the festival: how had Prince Androgeus fared? Daedalus told him that his son had been victorious: he had carried off the prize for which all the noblest Athenian youths contended. The father rejoiced greatly, until he marked Daedalus looking at him with so mournful a countenance that he knew there was more to come. He pressed him with questions, and at last the craftsman told him all. The bull which Heracles had carried off from Crete was now ravaging the plains of Marathon. Many had tried in vain to slay or capture it. Aegeus, the childless king, who had ruled in Attica so long, now commanded Androgeus to go forth against the monster, for all the young Athenians were jealous of the Cretan's prowess. The hapless young man was slain at the first encounter.

When Minos heard of the fate of his son he swore a mighty oath that his death should not go unavenged. At once he declared war upon Attica, and beset Athens by land and sea. In spite of the might of the Cretan army and navy, the Athenians held out for many months, until Minos, beginning to despair of taking the city, prayed to Zeus to aid him in wreaking just vengeance on the slayers of Androgeus. Zeus heard his prayer, and sent famine and plague upon the Athenians. In vain did they endeavour to appease the god by prayer and sacrifice; when they consulted the oracle the priestess replied that their sufferings would continue until they submitted to the invader. Thereupon they yielded. Minos demanded that every ninth year a ship should be sent to Cnossus with seven fair youths and

seven fair maidens of Athenian blood on board. The hapless beings were doomed to be devoured by the Minotaur, for by this name the hideous offspring of Pasiphae was known. Nevertheless Aegeus could not refuse; he was compelled to dispatch the first shipload of men and maidens that very year. When they landed they were one by one handed over to their horrible doom. For the Minotaur had grown more fierce day by day; soon it was impossible to keep him in the palace, and as time went on he became a danger to the land. Minos therefore employed the cunning Daedalus to construct a prison for the monster, of a kind entirely new. He made a labyrinth or maze so skilfully that no one who once entered upon the winding paths could ever trace his way out again: he would wander on and on, turning now this way, now that, but never coming back to the place from which he started. In the centre of this labyrinth Minos imprisoned the Minotaur. Thus any unhappy creature that got into the maze, unable to get out, was bound to find himself at last confronted by the dread monster, which devoured him on the spot. Daedalus alone could make his way through the convolutions of the maze, for he possessed a clue of thread, which he fastened at the entrance.

Thus, as the years passed on, numbers of Athenian youths and maidens were sacrificed to the Minotaur, and Minos's heart knew no softening. Indeed the king, who had once been celebrated for his wisdom and justice, became hatefully known for his cruelty. Gruesome bull-fights were celebrated at his court, and he refused to forgo the Athenian tribute, in spite of all the appeals made to him by his daughter Ariadne. Ariadne, the daughter of his first wife, was well named the 'very holy' one, for her heart was full of gentle tenderness and care for

all suffering things. At Cnossus she was most unhappy because of the cruel sights she had to see and the even more terrible unseen things which she knew to happen in the labyrinth. Many sought her hand, for she was very beautiful; but the man she could love had not appeared.

The day came round on which the unhappy Athenian ship was due to arrive. Many gathered to the harbour to see it, for the news had reached Crete that it would bring on board a mighty hero, who was risking his life in the hope of saving his countrymen by slaying the Minotaur, as he had already slain the bull of Marathon. As the great black sail which the ill-fated vessel always bore came slowly nearer, Ariadne, standing at the palace windows, felt the tears rush to her eyes. She scanned the faces of the unhappy men and women who were being borne so rapidly to their doom. Most looked downcast enough, but there was one who seemed to know no fear. He stood somewhat apart, his fair hair blown back by the breeze, beneath the gold circlet which showed that he was a person of lofty rank; and his keen eyes appeared to take in all the scene before him with an interest much unlike the gloomy despair on his companions' faces. As those eyes met hers Ariadne felt a strange new sensation. When the boat had anchored she called to one of her servants to find out for her who the young man was.

The man soon came back, and told her the story of which all Cnossus was talking. For years, Aegeus, king of Athens, grandson of Cecrops, great grandson of Erechtheus, had been in despair because he had no heir; although he had married twice no children had been born to him. At last he went to Delphi. The oracle gave him a reply which he understood so little

that he consulted Pittheus, the wise king of Troezen. Pittheus told him that he should have an heir, and one whose renown should travel throughout Greece, if he were to marry Aithra, the king's daughter, and then leave her in Troezen while he returned to Athens. Aegeus agreed. The marriage was celebrated, and Aegeus departed, leaving his sword and shoes under a stone. Aithra promised that when the son she was to bear was strong enough to lift the stone and wield the sword, she would send him to Athens to the king, who would wait there, in faith, for his coming.

So in due time a boy was born, whom Aithra called Theseus; she knew, and Pittheus also, that his true father was the god Poseidon. The wise Pittheus brought him up and educated him, and had him trained in all manly exercises. The youth was tall for his age, and of such strength that none of his companions could match him, not even those who were much older. Not one of them could move the stone, though all of them tried to raise it; but at sixteen Theseus dedicated his forelocks to the Delphian Apollo, as a sign that boyhood was past, and going to the stone lifted it with ease. Underneath it he found the sword, which he girded at his side, and the shoes; and with them he set out for Athens, after bidding farewell to his mother. On his way he met with many adventures. At Epidaurus he had to pass by a giant called Periphetes, who used to rush out upon passers-by, swinging a huge iron club round his head. Many had lost their lives in this way, but Theseus saved all those who came after, for he rushed upon Periphetes and attacked him with such fury that the monster, taken by surprise, let his club fall; whereupon Theseus slew him. Passing on his way, he came to the Isthmus of Corinth, a spot dreaded by travellers, because

of the danger of encountering the robber Sinis, son of a centaur. Sinis was possessed of enormous strength. When he met a traveller he would seize two great pine-trees, bend them down till their tops nearly touched the ground, and then tie the wretched man to the trees, which he let go. Theseus came upon this dreaded ruffian and, nothing daunted by his hideous threats, slew him in the same manner in which Sinis had slain so many hapless travellers. Not far from Megara he killed the wild sow, called 'the grey one', which had for long ravaged the plains there. As he crossed the border between Megara and Attica he came upon Sciron, another deadly pest to those who used the road. Sciron used to capture passers-by and then bring them to a rock overhanging the sea, where he sat down and compelled them to wash his feet. When they had done he kicked them down into the water below, where an immense tortoise devoured their dead bodies. Theseus came upon him from behind, and pushed him down to share their fate. Near Eleusis he wrestled with Cercyon, the king, who challenged every one who came his way, and had caused the death of great numbers. He began by jeering at Theseus' youth and slender build; but his laughter soon ceased, and he lay dead upon the ground. Theseus set Cercyon's grandson on the throne, and went on his way. Eleusis was also the home of another monster, the giant Procrustes, or the stretcher, whose bed was ill famed throughout Attica. Procrustes had a bed upon which he invited travellers to pass the night. If he found them too short for it he stretched them on a rack until they expired in agony; if, on the other hand, they were too long, he cut off their feet to make them the right length. Theseus slew him too. Having rendered these great services to all



ATHENE STANDING BEFORE A COLUMN
An Attic relief

travellers and users of the road, he betook himself to the children of Phytalus, to be purified of the blood he had shed, for Sinis was a kinsman to him by blood, and the Greeks deemed the slayer of a blood relation to be hateful to the gods, more especially to the Erinyes, who would punish him, unless purified. Phytalus had once given hospitality to the goddess Demeter, when she came to his house in the guise of an old woman. As a reward she gave him a fig-tree, the first to grow in Greece, and he had become very rich thereby.

Thus at last Theseus reached Athens. As he passed along the streets clad in the long-skirted garments worn by the men of Troezen, with his hair falling in curls upon his shoulders, some men who were putting the roof on to the new temple of Apollo Delphinus began to jeer at him. 'Why,' they asked, 'was such a pretty girl out alone?' Theseus made no reply in words to their jests; he merely took the bullocks out of their carts, which were standing below, and flung them up higher than the roof of the temple. Then he passed on his way, leaving the men to marvel at his strength.

When he reached the palace, Aegeus knew, as soon as Theseus held out the sword and shoes, that this was his long-looked-for son. Joyful indeed was the king's heart when he saw the splendid young hero who was given to him to inherit his kingdom and protect his old age. Theseus was publicly proclaimed as the king's son and heir to the throne, and great rejoicings were held in his honour. All rejoiced save the fifty gigantic sons of Pallas, Aegeus' brother, who had hoped that the kingdom would fall to them on the death of their childless uncle. They laid a plot to murder Theseus, but he was warned in time, and slew them all. Every one at Athens was glad, for the sons of Pallas had made the

court intolerable with their incessant brawls, and done nothing to help the people to get rid of the two great curses that lay upon the land—the ravaging bull of Marathon and the tribute of men and maidens sent every ninth year to the Minotaur.

Theseus at once set out against the bull, captured it in spite of the living flame that came from its mouth and nostrils, and brought it alive to Athens amid the wonder of all the people. There he sacrificed it before the high altar to Apollo Delphinus. Then, since the time was close at hand when the lots were to be drawn to choose those doomed to sail for Crete on board the fatal ship, Theseus offered to go of his own free will, for he believed that he could slay the direful Minotaur, and there was no other in the world who could perform the deed save the mighty Heracles, already bound to other tasks. At first Aegeus begged him not to go; he had small hope of his return, and the time in which he had enjoyed him was so short; but the young man's purpose held; his mind was made up, he insisted upon going. He promised his father that if he were successful, as he felt sure he should be, in spite of the great difficulties of the task (many of which were still unknown to him, for none had ever returned to describe the horrors of the labyrinth), then, if he were returning alive the ship should bear a white sail instead of the black one which was hoisted when it put to sea.

Such was Theseus, whom Ariadne beheld as he stood on the deck. Minos received him with due honour, as the son of Athens' king, and bade him tarry in the palace before setting forth on an enterprise over which the king shrugged his shoulders with a bitter smile. He did not disguise from Theseus that he thought there was no hope; he never would return from the

labyrinth. Theseus smiled in his turn, and said he meant to try. 'I trust ever in the help of my father—Poseidon,' he said. Minos looked up. He now dreaded the very name of the god who had once protected and helped him. Ariadne gazed at the young hero with all her soul in her eyes. Her secret heart was full of prayer. At first she prayed that he might escape in safety, but soon she saw that Theseus would never consent to escape; he would dare the uttermost; and so she began to pray that he might succeed and slay the Minotaur.

Minos meantime drew a ring from his finger—they were seated on the terrace of the palace, looking over the sea—and cast it into the water, bidding Theseus, if he really were the son of Poseidon, bring it up to him. He spoke as it were in jest, for the task seemed impossible. But Theseus, without a moment's hesitation, dived from the terrace, and in a few moments they saw him swimming towards them with his golden circlet on his head and on the finger of his uplifted hand the flashing ring of Minos.

Ariadne knew, though no word had yet been spoken between them, that Theseus was the hero for whom she had always been waiting, without knowing it; she knew that she loved him. All day she sat in her chamber while he hunted with her brothers, wondering how she could help him. At last when evening came on she thought of a way.

As Theseus stood on the terrace watching the moon rise over the sea he resolved that on the morrow he would set forth against the Minotaur. He was no longer so confident of success as when he left Athens. He had seen the entrance to the labyrinth, and looked down from a mountain height upon the winding paths of the death-trap. He had heard of all those who had

gone in and never returned : all those who had been destroyed by the gruesome Minotaur. A cold despair invaded him as he thought that he was to die, young as he was, and after so many heroic exploits ; die without saving his countrymen, so that year after year the hapless ship must come with its human sacrifice. As he mused he was suddenly aware of a soft touch on his arm. Looking round, he saw at his side the king's lovely daughter. As she raised to his face the beautiful deep blue eyes which he had noticed as she sat by him at the banquet, he saw that the expression of her exquisite face was strangely set and determined. In her hand she held something that looked like a ball of golden thread. ' Theseus,' she said, ' my heart has long ached with pity for the fate of those who are given to this monster, but I have borne it. But now that I see you setting forth I cannot bear it. . . . ' And she told him that Daedalus, the cunning old craftsman who had built the maze, had at last, softened by her tears, given her the clue by means of which she could lead a man safely to the heart of the maze and out again. Her father must never know, or in his wrath he would slay Daedalus, and not spare his own daughter.

Then in a passion of gratitude Theseus fell on his knees before Ariadne, kissed her hands, and told her that he loved her. Indeed at that moment he believed it, and so did Ariadne, and her heart was full of deep joy, in spite of the perils that lay before them.

Next morning at earliest dawn Theseus arose, and at the palace gates he found Ariadne waiting for him. She led him to the entrance of the labyrinth—an opening in a dark and sombre wall of rock. For a few steps they were in total darkness ; then when a dim ray of light penetrated Ariadne took the ball of thread that

Daedalus had given her and bound one end firmly round a jutting piece of rock, so that it was securely fastened. Then she bade Theseus follow her and led on, drawing out the thread. In and out by devious winding paths they went, now making their way through rocky passages, now winding in and out among the leafless trees of dense thickets, crossing swollen and turbid streams, and darting under overhanging cliffs that threatened to fall and crush them. The landscape was unspeakably dreary; it looked as though the sun never shone there, and no rain fell to refresh the parched ground. But Theseus had no eyes for aught save the path. Again and again it turned sharply to the right or left, or twisted back upon itself without any apparent reason. At the best it was a track most difficult to follow, and as Theseus stepped closely after Ariadne he realized that, without her, he must inevitably have wandered from the way and become lost in the jungle of the maze. At last, after what seemed to him an endless time, they suddenly emerged into an open space of circular shape, from which paths started off in every direction, each so like all the others that Theseus looked round him in dazed perplexity. Already he had lost all knowledge of which was the one that he had left. The ground, which was burned and withered as were all the trees and bushes round, scorched dry by some uncanny heat, was horribly strewn with bones. Theseus shuddered as his foot struck against a human skull; the thought occurred to him that it might belong to some hapless Athenian comrade who had perished there. Ariadne laid her hand upon his arm and pointed to where behind a great clump of withered brushwood, at one side of the barren stretch of ground, something could be seen moving. At the same time a low ominous

sound was heard. Theseus knew that he must be within earshot of the Minotaur itself, and he rejoiced. In the dim mysteries of the labyrinth his spirit might quail; but in actual danger he knew no fear. He kissed Ariadne, and then, drawing his sword, advanced swiftly upon the monster.

The maiden turned away and hid her face in her hands. All around the air was full of a strange, insufferable heat, and horrible half-human noises filled her ears. Suddenly a dreadful piercing shriek rang out: not a human cry, but the bellow of a wild beast in agony. At that sound Ariadne raised her head, and as she looked up she saw Theseus standing over the body of the Minotaur, his bloodstained sword raised above his head. Once, twice, thrice he plunged it deep into the prostrate form. No more cries were heard; all around was silence.

Then Ariadne ran up to the hero and caught him by the arm. 'Quick, quick, let us be gone,' she cried. 'The darkness is coming on.' In truth the sky around was growing a dull red that swiftly darkened, even as they stood there, into a brown mist that gathered round and hid the shapes of things from them. 'Take hold of my dress,' Ariadne commanded, and holding firmly to the clue of thread she led the way. It was now perfectly dark; they could see nothing, not even the swarming night-birds that flew round their heads with evil croaking, and nothing but the clue could have saved them. As it was the journey seemed endless. More than once, as he stumbled over rocks or plunged knee-deep in water, Theseus thought that the thread must have broken, so devious was the route, but Ariadne reassured him, and led boldly on, her hand upon the slender silken cord. At last they emerged into the

daylight. Theseus caught Ariadne, who was fainting from exhaustion, in his arms, and ran with her to where the Athenian ship lay anchored, for she had told him that so soon as Minos knew what had happened he would pursue in fury.

When the Athenians on board heard what had happened their joy at their escape was beyond bounds, and they rowed as they had never rowed before. Thus the ship had disappeared over the horizon by the time that Minos discovered what had passed, and there was no one on whom he could wreak his vengeance save Daedalus, who had given Ariadne the clue. Minos caused him to be imprisoned in the labyrinth with his son, for he thought that without the clue the cunning artificer could not escape from his own trap. Daedalus, however, was cleverer than Minos knew. He had long been seeking to discover how to fly, and now put his invention to use. He bound wings made of waxen feathers to his own shoulders and those of his son Icarus; on them they soared out of the maze and away from Crete towards Sicily. Icarus, however, in the rapture of flight, came too near the sun, in spite of his father's warning. The wax with which his wings were fastened melted, and he fell into the sea and was drowned. When Minos pursued Daedalus to Sicily, Daedalus slew him.

Meantime Theseus and Ariadne were sailing swiftly over the sea towards Greece. But alas! for Ariadne, her happiness was short-lived. Theseus' love was but gratitude in disguise; now that the danger was over he found that he had only fancied that he loved Ariadne. Even her beauty and her affection for him, for whom she had given up everything, were of no avail. On the island of Naxos, where they had landed for water, he

left her sleeping. When she awoke the ship was but a speck in the distance.

Rejoicing in his success, Theseus soon forgot Ariadne. He also forgot his promise to his father to hoist a white sail if the company returned successful. Aegeus went up daily to the Acropolis to watch for the ship returning; when at last it hove in sight and he saw the ominous black sail still spread, the old man threw himself in despair from the height of the citadel, and perished on the spot. Thus, when Theseus landed, he was hailed as king in Athens.

The Athenians always looked upon him as the real founder of their state, for he made into one community all the little townships which had grown up side by side, more or less independent of one another. And he extended the Attic territory as far as the Isthmus of Corinth. There he caused the Isthmian games to be celebrated with increased pomp in honour of Poseidon.

Theseus was not only a great king. All his life he was ever ready to engage in heroic exploits. He went with Jason on the voyage of the Argo; he obeyed Meleager's summons to the Calydonian boar hunt;¹ he went with Heracles against the Amazons;² and with his inseparable friend and companion Pirithöus he engaged in all sorts of heroic adventures; it was on one of these that Theseus won as his bride the fair Antiope, sister to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons. Antiope bore to Theseus a noble son named Hippolytus, whose tragic story is told by Euripides in one of his plays. Theseus also assisted Pirithöus in his war against the centaurs. Pirithöus, prince of the Thessalian Lapithae, had invited all the noblest heroes in Greece as guests at his wedding with Hippodameia, a princess

¹ See chapter vii.

² See chapter v.

of the same race. Among them came the centaurs, who were indeed kindred to Pirithöus. Unhappily, however, the centaurs were unable to resist the rich wines that flowed freely at the banquet. Wine darkened the mind of one of them, Eurytion by name, so far that he even attempted to carry off the bride, and the other centaurs followed his example and fell upon the women of the Lapithae. Theseus rescued the bride, and in the battle that followed the centaurs were utterly defeated, for all their mighty strength, and driven away from Mount Pelion, which till then had been their home.

This was not the only occasion on which Theseus helped Pirithöus. When his friend was mad enough to fall in love with the goddess Persephone, of whom he caught sight as she was gathering flowers on earth, Theseus went down with him into the dread realm of Hades in search of her. For this sacrilege the friends were severely punished: they were fastened to a rock in the underworld and condemned to remain there. It was in this sad plight that Heracles¹ found his friend Theseus, when he descended into Hades in search of Cerberus. He delivered the Athenian king, and brought him up to the light of day again.

No hero was more highly honoured in Athens than Theseus; he was looked upon, indeed, as the second founder of the city. But great as were his exploits, he never knew complete happiness. He was honoured rather than loved by his countrymen; and for himself, the hard heart that had deserted Ariadne and forgotten Aegeus kept him from the highest joy.

¹ See chapter v.

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF THEBES

CADMUS, the ancestor of the Boeotian royal family and builder of the town of Thebes, was descended from Io, a maid whose matchless beauty brought upon her sufferings only surpassed by those of Prometheus. She was the daughter of Inachus, and a priestess in the temple of Hera at Argos. It was there that Zeus saw her, and he spoke so loudly in praise of her loveliness that Hera, seeing that all his thoughts were set upon her, became madly jealous of her own priestess. She transformed the maiden into a white heifer, and set Argus of the hundred eyes to watch and guard over her and prevent any one from approaching near. Zeus, however, sent Hermes to slay Argus. Thereupon Hera sent a stinging gadfly, which maddened the unfortunate heifer: wherever she turned she could not escape from it: it pursued her without rest. In vain did she travel from land to land, seeking relief and finding none. All over Europe and Asia, by land and sea, did hapless Io thus wander in the guise of a heifer; it was from her passage that the Ionian Gulf and the Bosphorus acquired their names. At length when she reached Egypt, after age-long wanderings without food or sleep, Zeus, on account of whose love Io had undergone these weary sufferings, restored her to her woman's form. In Egypt her son Epaphus was born; he had in his turn two sons, Belus the father of Danaus, from whom the Greeks took their name of Danaans, and Agenor, who went to Phoenicia and became ruler over the rich territories there. His

daughter was that fair Europa whom Zeus carried off to Crete to be the mother of Minos. When she was borne away on the back of the bull, Agenor sent his sons Cadmus and Cilix in pursuit, to bring back their sister if they could. Far and wide they searched for her, without success. Wearied and outworn by what seemed a hopeless enterprise, Cilix settled in a land which was ever after named after him, Cilicia; but Cadmus wandered on. On reaching Thrace he resolved to consult the oracle at Delphi as to the best means of finding his sister. The priestess bade him abandon the fruitless search; instead he was to follow the guidance of a cow, and found a city on the spot where the animal should lie down. Cadmus obeyed, and the cow led him into Boeotia, and there lay down.

When Cadmus prepared to sacrifice it to the gods, a fearful dragon suddenly came forth and destroyed not only the cow but nearly all the companions of Cadmus. At last, after a severe struggle, he slew the monster, and then, by the counsel which Athene put into his mind, he plucked forth its teeth and sowed them in the ground. A host of armed men immediately sprang into life, and began fighting together. All were slain but five. They, the 'Spartoi', 'the sown men', helped Cadmus to build a citadel, round which the town of Thebes grew up. For eight years Cadmus himself did penance for the slaughter of the serpent, which had been sacred to Ares; at the end of that time he was fully forgiven and married with the utmost pomp, in the presence of the gods themselves, to Harmonia, the daughter of Ares and Aphrodite. Cadmus gave his bride a magnificent necklace, the work of Hephaestus, which had originally belonged to his hapless sister Europa. Little did he guess the misfortunes of which

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that jewel was to be the cause, in time to come, to all his house.

Five children were born to Cadmus and Harmonia. Polydorus, the eldest son, ruled after his father in Thebes. Semele, the eldest daughter, perished in agony when Zeus, who loved her, came to visit her, at her own misguided request, in all the terrible majesty of thunder and lightning in which Hera knew him. Zeus saved the child of Semele, and gave him to the mountain nymphs of Nysa to nurse. When the boy grew up, and returned from India, Asia, and Thrace, whither he had wandered, he brought with him a troop of frenzied worshippers, and everywhere the people bowed before him and acknowledged that he was indeed the god Dionysus. The Bacchantes, as his followers called themselves, carried on their rites on the mountain-sides, where they rushed about or danced to strains of wild and mystic music, clad in the skins of fawns or leopards, and bearing in their hands the staff known as the thyrsus, wreathed with ivy and vine leaves, and crowned with a pine cone. Round their heads they bound vine leaves, and clusters of grapes hung at their ears. Thebes, which had by this time grown to fame and wealth, was the first city to which Dionysus came to establish his worship. The aged Cadmus at once acknowledged the new god; he and his daughters, with Tiresias the seer, at once began to offer praise and worship, according to the rites Dionysus enjoined. But Pentheus, son of Agave, the youngest daughter of Cadmus, remained stubborn in his unbelief. He refused to acknowledge the god, and instead offered him every kind of insult. None of the miracles shown convinced Pentheus; he mocked at the ritual, and declared that the women of Thebes had all gone mad. When Agave went with her

sisters and a large body of Theban women up to the slopes of Mount Cithaeron to celebrate the rites of Dionysus, Pentheus followed and climbed a tree to watch them. The anger of the god had indeed deprived the young man of his senses, for it was impious in the highest degree for any male to be present at these ceremonies. Suddenly the women, sweeping past in the frenzy of worship, caught sight of him; Agave foremost, they pulled down the tree and tore the intruder to pieces. Agave herself returned to Thebes, followed by a triumphal procession of dancing Bacchantes, carrying on her thyrsus the head of her slaughtered son.

Soon after this horrible event the aged Cadmus left the throne to his son Polydorus, and retired with his wife to dwell among the Illyrians. The Thebans believed that at their death Zeus changed Cadmus and Harmonia into serpents, in which shape they inhabited the Elysian fields.

Polydorus reigned in Thebes, and after him his son Labdakus. Labdakus, dying, left Laius, his son, an infant, under the guardianship of Lycus, who therefore ruled in his stead. The niece of Lycus was a maiden of marvellous beauty, Antiope by name. One day, as she wandered in the woods, at the time of noontide heat, drowsiness overcame her, and she lay down to sleep under the spreading boughs of a great oak-tree. When she awoke she found a satyr sitting by her side, looking into her face with wondering admiration. These satyrs were woodland sprites with bristling hair, goat-like ears, and hairy legs that sometimes ended in goats' feet. This satyr, however, who appeared human save for his pointed ears, was really Zeus in disguise. In his society and converse Antiope, not guessing who he was, found wondrous delight, and at last she was secretly

wedded to him in the woods. When her uncle discovered what had passed he was furiously angry. Antiope's twin sons, Amphion and Zethus, were taken from her and left in the woods to perish. Herdsmen found them and brought them up, and so they grew to manhood, not knowing their own names or those of their parents. Poor Antiope meantime mourned for them as dead. For long years she was imprisoned and harshly persecuted by Lycus and his cruel wife Dirce. At last, unable to bear it any longer, she escaped and fled to the woods, where she found a refuge with the two young huntsmen. When Dirce came in pursuit of her, Amphion and Zethus learned from the queen's furious speeches that the fugitive whom they had taken in was the mother they had never known, and they at once took vengeance for all that she had suffered. They tied the cruel Dirce to the horns of a savage bull, which dragged her to death; then, going to the palace, they slew Lycus and seized the throne.

The two brothers, although devoted to one another, were remarkably unlike. Zethus was an energetic warrior; Amphion, who married Niobe,¹ sister of Pelops, was a musician. Hermes had taught him to play on the lyre, and the rhythm of his music was so irresistible, that, as he played, the stones on the roadside rose and arranged themselves in a fortification round the city of Thebes.

On the death of the two brothers, Laius regained his kingdom, and reigned in Thebes with his wife Jocasta. For long they had no children. At last Laius prayed to Apollo to grant him a son. Apollo heard his prayer, but warned him, through his oracle, that he himself was doomed to die at the hands of that son. Laius,

¹ See chapter xi.

horror-struck, thought to frustrate the decree. When the promised son was born, he and his wife tied its little hands and feet together with leathern thongs, and gave the infant to a slave to kill.

The slave took the baby up to the slopes of Mount Cithaeron, but there his heart failed him at the thought of killing it, and he gave it to a Corinthian shepherd. The man in his turn presented the child to Polybus, the childless king of Corinth. Polybus and Merope his wife cherished the boy, whom they called Oedipus, because of the way in which his feet had swollen up beneath the cruel thongs, and brought him up as their own son. Oedipus had no suspicion that he was not their son indeed, until one day one of his companions taunted him with being a foundling, and said that he did not know the name of his own father. Since he could get no answer from Polybus and Merope, Oedipus set forth without their knowledge to consult the oracle at Delphi. The god, instead of telling him the name of his parents, prophesied that he should live to be the murderer of his own father, the husband of his own mother, and the father of a race hateful to all mankind. Horrified by this terrible saying, the young man resolved never to return to Corinth, since he now felt sure that Polybus and Merope were his parents, and had refused to speak because they knew the awful prophecy he had just heard. He therefore turned his back on Corinth and set off in the opposite direction, without knowing whither he was going, or caring. As he came along the valley road, the hills rose higher and more precipitous in front of him, until suddenly the road turned round, blocked by the sheer heights of Helicon, and divided to the right and to the left. At the narrow cross-roads the path was blocked by a carriage, in which an old

man sat. Several servants accompanied him; one of them, going on ahead, pushed Oedipus rudely out of the way, and the driver directed the coach so that it filled up the whole of the road. Oedipus stepped aside not too willingly; then, as he shouted angrily to the cavalcade that they left him no room at all, the old man leaned out and hit him over the head with his staff. At that the young man's naturally hot temper blazed out: he hit back—the old man fell out of the carriage and broke his neck. Meantime Oedipus slew two of the attendants. The third fled with all speed back to Thebes, where he recounted that Laius—for it was in fact the king, though Oedipus had no notion thereof—had been slain by a band of robbers. He invented this story because he thought that his own flight would seem disgraceful if he admitted that one young man had done it all. In Thebes the king's death caused less excitement than might have been expected, because for some time past all men's thoughts and energies had been busied with a strange and awful monster, which had been sent into the country by the gods in token of their displeasure, and was now ravaging it. This was the sphinx—a being with the face of a woman, the feet and tail of a lion, and the wings of a bird. She had taken up her abode on Phikium, a bold rocky mountain at the south-east corner of Lake Copais, and there was no hope of getting rid of her until some one was found able to answer the riddle which she set. Many had tried, but in vain; all those who failed to guess were devoured by the sphinx.

Oedipus came upon this strange monster as he drew near to Thebes; undaunted by her terrifying appearance, he demanded to hear the riddle in answering which so many had lost their lives. 'What is it,' the sphinx

demanded, 'which is four-footed in the morning, three-footed at night, and two-footed at noon?' 'Man,' Oedipus replied at once. 'In his infancy, when he crawls upon the ground, he is four-footed; in old age, when he leans upon a stick, he is three-footed; walking upright, he is two-footed.' Hearing this reply, the sphinx cast herself with an unearthly shriek from the mountain-top and disappeared for ever.

In Thebes, Oedipus was received with wild acclamation. As the man who had rid the land of the sphinx, the people at once called upon him to become their king, and Creon gave him his sister Jocasta, the late king's widow, to wife. For many years then Oedipus ruled in Thebes, honoured and admired by all for his wisdom and public spirit. His life was blameless, and he was wholly devoted to the public good. There seemed no sign of the dark shadow that hovered over him, all unknown to himself: his two sons and two daughters grew up fair and strong, and his good fortune seemed complete.

But the gods were only biding their time. Laius and Jocasta had sinned in trying to frustrate their will by exposing their infant son: Oedipus had to suffer for the sins of his parents and for his own. In ignorance he had slain the old man at the cross-roads; and had thought that the Delphic prophecy was not to be fulfilled in his case.

Suddenly the land was visited by a terrible plague, which attacked men and cattle, so that hundreds perished daily, and no cure could be found. Oedipus, who had always been sincerely religious, at once resolved to consult the Delphic oracle, and sent Creon thither with an embassy, to find out whether the cause of the plague were any sin committed in the land. The oracle declared that the murderer of Laius, who was

living in Thebes, must be banished or slain. Oedipus, not knowing in his blind ignorance that he himself was the murderer of Laius, and at a loss how to discover him, sent for Tiresias. When the old blind seer told him that he himself was the man, he refused to believe it. Laius had been slain by robbers, so the sole survivor had reported. A hue-and-cry was set on foot to find the servant who had brought the news. He came, and the horrible truth burst at once upon the hapless Oedipus. He had, as the oracle foretold, slain his own father: he was the husband of his mother: he had brought this misery upon the land. No sooner had Jocasta realized all this than she rushed out and hanged herself in her own apartments, unable to bear the horror. When this last rueful news was brought him, Oedipus, utterly broken, bowed his head before the avenging destiny of his race. He was the ignorant agent of all: as the murderer of Laius he had brought plague upon the land he loved; he was the murderer of his own father; he had wedded in sin, and now it was his sin that had caused the death of Jocasta: he was her murderer too. The Erinyes hovered near to exact vengeance for the blood of kindred. In his blindness he had refused to see: now he took the brooch of gold that Jocasta wore and put out both his eyes with its sharp pin. Oedipus resigned the crown to Creon, and left Thebes: banishing himself from the city on which the curse of his house had brought misfortune. But the curse still lay on every member of that unhappy family. Eteocles and Polyneices, the two sons of Oedipus, instead of pitying their unhappy father, drove the poor blind old man forth from the land with indignity. Then did the people of Thebes realize the truth of the words of Solon, the Athenian philosopher, 'Count no man happy till he is

dead.' Antigone, the king's daughter, went with him as his guide in all his hapless wanderings, until, by the direction of Apollo, he at last found rest on Attic soil, in the deme of Colonus. There the gods had pity on his penitence and sorrow, for he learned in adversity to see the truth as he had never known it in prosperity. The Erinyes, who had pursued him, were transformed into gentle presences that protected him, and it was in the grove sacred to them at Colonus that he stayed his steps. Thither ambassadors came to him from his son Eteocles. The brothers had quarrelled about who was to succeed to the throne : Eteocles, though the younger, drove Polyneices forth by force. Now, because an oracle had told him that good fortune should attend the land which held the bones of Oedipus, Eteocles sought to induce the aged father, whom he and his brother had expelled, to return to Thebes. Oedipus utterly refused. Nor did he listen to Polyneices, when he in his turn came to ask him to go with him on the expedition which he had collected to go against Eteocles. Oedipus saw clearly that it was not any love or pity for him that thus prompted each son in turn to seek him out ; each sought only an advantage to himself. Therefore, he solemnly laid his curse upon them, and prayed to the gods that they should die miserably, each by the sword of the other. When Eteocles sent Creon with a bodyguard to carry him off by force, Oedipus appealed to Theseus, the Athenian king, for protection. Theseus at once offered him an asylum ; and thus it came to pass that Oedipus passed away upon Athenian soil. His end was mysterious : it took place in a thunder-storm, when some said that the aged king was carried up to the heavens. His body, at any rate, could never be found.

Polyneices, meantime, driven forth from Thebes by his brother, sought refuge with Adrastus, king of Argos. Outside the walls he encountered another fugitive, who was, though Polyneices knew it not, Tydeus, exiled from Aetolia. In the darkness the two fell to blows and fought until Adrastus came out and parted them. An oracle had bid him give his two daughters in marriage to a boar and a lion, and since he now saw to his surprise that Tydeus carried a boar on his shield and Polyneices a lion upon his, the weddings were celebrated without delay. Adrastus immediately gathered an expedition to restore his sons-in-law to their countries.

Most of the Argive chiefs willingly agreed to go against Thebes; but one refused, Amphiaraus, far the noblest and most distinguished of them all, a hero who had already won great honour in the hunt of the Calydonian boar¹ and on the voyage of the Argonauts.² He had inherited from his ancestor Melampus the gift of second sight, and now foretold that he himself and all the principal leaders must lose their lives if they assisted Polyneices in an enterprise which was unjust and contrary to the will of the gods. At last, however, Polyneices hit upon a way of over-persuading Amphiaraus. He offered to Eriphyle, the wife of the hero, the magnificent necklace which Cadmus had given to Harmonia as a wedding gift, on condition that her husband took part in the fatal expedition. The hateful Eriphyle took the bribe and betrayed to Polyneices the spot where her husband had hidden. As Amphiaraus set forth he commanded his son Alcmaeon to avenge his approaching death by killing Eriphyle and by undertaking a second expedition against Thebes.

Thebes had seven gates, and the expedition set forth

¹ See chapter vii.

² See chapter vi.

in seven detachments, each led by a celebrated chief. The seven were Adrastus, Amphiaräus, Capaneus, Hippomedon, Parthenopæus, Tydeus, and Polyneices.

The Thebans marched out against the invaders, assisted by the men of Phocis and Phlegya, but they were defeated in battle and forced to retire within the city walls. Tiresias declared that they would be certain of victory if Creon's son Menoeceus would offer himself to Ares, whereupon the heroic youth at once went out and slew himself before the gates, thus winning the protection of the gods for his party. The seven performed prodigies of valour, but in vain. Parthenopæus was slain and Capaneus struck by lightning as he climbed the walls, declaring as he did so that not even the lightning of Zeus could keep him back. When they saw this the Argives were terror-struck, and began to retreat. Then Eteocles came forward to propose that the battle should be decided by single combat between himself and Polyneices. Polyneices eagerly agreed, and the brothers fought with such fury that the curse of Oedipus was fulfilled: both lay dead upon the field. Thereupon the two armies renewed the fight. Tydeus and Hippomedon were slain. As the spear of the enemy was about to descend on Amphiaräus, Zeus interposed: the earth opened and received him and his chariot: he was seen no more. Later the pious hero was worshipped as a demi-god at Argos. Adrastus alone survived: but only the matchless swiftness of his horse, the gift of Poseidon, saved him from destruction: he brought nothing back to Argos save his garment of woe and his black-maned steed.

Creon now ruled in Thebes. He caused Eteocles to be buried with all the honours of war: but left the body of Polyneices to be devoured by dogs and vultures,

although this meant that his spirit would find no rest in death. To deny due burial to an enemy was to a Greek a wicked and sacrilegious act. When Antigone, the sister of Polyneices, heard Creon's decree, she resolved to disobey it, and render to her brother the last rites of the dead. Ismene, her younger sister, warned her that Creon's wrath would be terrible: death was the punishment for any one who disobeyed his decree: but Antigone refused to listen. Her duty to her dead brother came before all else: in all other matters she would obey Creon and the law, but in this there was a higher law. Creon's watchman caught her in the act of preparing the body of Polyneices for burial; she was bound and brought back a prisoner to the citadel. Although Tiresias, the aged seer, solemnly warned Creon not to slay the maiden, and Haemon, Creon's son, to whom Antigone was to be married, entreated him to spare her, Creon ordered her to be buried alive, as a breaker of the law. Haemon killed himself outside the tomb in which Antigone was already dead. When his mother heard of his death she likewise perished by her own hand.

Outside of the gate of Thebes there stood, down to historical times, the tombs of the brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, who were worshipped there as heroes. Their hatred of one another still endured, it seemed, for it was observed by worshippers that the smoke of the two altars invariably blew in exactly opposite directions.

The misfortunes of Thebes were not yet complete. Adrastus roused the sons of the six who had with him led the former expedition against the town to collect an army, and with allies from Corinth, Megara, Messene, and Arcadia, they marched out, encouraged by signs from

Zeus. Chief among them were Alcmaeon and Amphilochus, the sons of Amphiaraus; Thersander, the son of Polyneices; Diomedes, the son of Tydeus; Sthenelus, son of Capaneus; Promachus, the son of Parthenopaeus; and Aegialeus, son of Adrastus. At the river before the town the Theban army met them, only to be completely defeated. Tiresias told the Cadmeians that the gods had declared for the invaders, and advised them to send a herald offering to surrender the town. Thersander, son of Polyneices, was then established on the throne of Thebes.

The chief hero in this war was Alcmaeon. Having thus avenged the death of Amphiaraus, he now, in obedience to his dead father's commands, slew Eriphyle. Although the Delphic oracle had bid him do this, the Erinyes that avenge a mother's blood pursued him everywhere. They drove him to madness, and he could find no rest or relief anywhere. At last he went again to Delphi, and the god bade him dedicate the fatal necklace to the temple there, and then go and live at the mouth of the river Achelous, where on the new soil that the stream had turned up he could find a plot of land that had not seen the murder of his mother. Here Alcmaeon found rest; his son Acarnan gave the name Acarnania to the land.

CHAPTER IV

PERSEUS

ACRISIUS, king of Argos, had one fair daughter, Danae by name. As she grew up her father saw that she was of such exceeding beauty that many suitors were sure to come and ask her hand. Now the heart of Acrisius was heavy as he watched the maiden growing out of girlhood into womanhood, because an oracle had told him that his daughter would bear a son who would kill his grandfather and reign in Argos in his stead. In his heart he knew that the gods had devised this punishment because in years long past he had quarrelled with his twin brother, Proetus, and driven him out of Argos. At last, after many years had gone by, Proetus came back across the seas with an army lent him by Iobates, king of the Lycians, whose daughter, Stheneboea, he had wedded. Then Proetus compelled his brother to yield him the town of Tiryns. Round it the Cyclopes built for him great walls of unhewn stone, walls that may still be seen standing to this day. Acrisius knew, therefore, that he had displeased the gods; yet even when he heard the saying of the oracle he thought he could prevent their word from coming to pass. So he set all the most skilled craftsmen in Argos to work to build a high tower of shining brass, in a lonely spot by the sea, far away from any habitation. In the lower stories of the tower there were no windows; all the casements were set up high, so that none could see in from without, nor could any one within jump from

a window save at the risk of a horrible death. The small high doorway was reached by a lofty ladder. In the lower chambers was a great store of every kind of provision : casks of wine and honey, barrels of meal, goodly cheeses, and a rich supply of spiced and salted meats. At the very top of the tower a fair chamber was prepared, with beautiful hangings and carpets, a bed of gold, and furniture of carved and polished wood.

One day Danae was taken, with the maidens who attended on her, to see the tower, at which they marvelled greatly, wondering idly as they passed from room to room for whom this gorgeous prison—for such it seemed—had been prepared. While they were in the topmost chamber they heard strange sounds from below ; the small doorway through which they had come in was being soldered up, the ladders by which they had climbed up were taken away, and in no jest, but sober earnest, they were prisoners. Although for many days they wept aloud and cried out and lamented, it was of no avail. None heard their cries. No one came near them save a dumb slave, who from time to time brought fresh fish, meat, and fruit, with milk and eggs, and left his basket to be drawn up by a pulley.

All day long Danae sat in her high chamber, while the tears ran down her cheeks. She prayed to all the gods to set her free, but as day after day passed and she gazed out of her high window over the sea, her heart sank within her, as she thought how she must sit there alone until, as the useless years rolled by, she became very old, without knowing anything of what life was. Yet her prayers did not go unheard. Zeus did not allow the will of Acrisius to thwart the purpose of the gods. One evening, as Danae lay on her golden bed and watched the sun setting over the waters, the long

rays of light that fell upon her seemed to grow brighter and brighter, instead of fading away as the sun sank to rest; everything they touched seemed to be turning into gold; at her feet gold flakes lay heaped, and all around her there fell a wondrous golden shower. As she trembled before the marvel a voice addressed her gently in tones that filled her heart with strange joy. It told her that Zeus was with her, that he, out of his love for her, would give her a little son with whom she should escape from the Tower of Brass. His name should be Perseus, and in the years to come he should win immortal fame.

In the morning when Danae awoke all that had passed seemed to her like a dream: but her sadness had all gone, and she no longer mourned because of her imprisonment. Before many more months had passed the news came to king Acrisius that his daughter had a little son. Then in his rage he regretted that he had not slain her. Danae and her baby were brought down from the tower and put to sea in a wooden chest. A storm was raging, and as the chest tossed up and down on the waves the king's servants shook their heads at one another. There seemed no chance for the hapless mother and child to escape. But Zeus did not desert Danae. He held back all the winds save the soft west wind, which carried her gently across the sea and cast the chest ashore on the island of Seriphos.

There a fisherman, Dictys by name, pulled it in from the surf in his net, and opened it. Great was the good man's surprise when he found, within the wooden box, a fair young woman clad in garments that, though drenched and stained with the salt water, showed her to be of high rank, and in her arms a little child. Both were fainting with fatigue and half dead from

hunger and exposure; the kindly Dictys, however, took them to his own house, where he warmed and fed and clothed them both, and there he bade them find their home. Right gladly did Danae accept his gentle offer, and the good fisherman soon found his kindness repaid by the gentle ways and helpful hands of his beautiful guest. For Perseus Dictys did all that a father could have done, and so the boy grew up.

Now, although Dictys was but a humble fisherman, his birth was royal. He was a grandson of Aeolus, and his brother Polydectes was king of the little island of Seriphos. When the king's eyes fell upon the lovely woman dwelling in his brother's house, he desired to marry her, and often as Danae shook her head, Polydectes continued to ask her. She always said no: her life was devoted to her son: she had no wish to marry. Perseus, who was growing up and gaining daily in manly strength and skill, disliked Polydectes heartily. Indeed the king bore the young man no goodwill; although he pretended to be much attracted to him, and often invited him to the palace, he was secretly anxious to find some pretext for getting rid of him. One day when Perseus was seated at the banqueting table, Polydectes made him promise, as it were in jest, that he would perform any service he might ask. When the lad agreed, the king turned on him and said, 'Then I bid you bring me the head of the Gorgon Medusa.'

Perseus thought that he had spoken idly, but the next day he discovered that the king meant to hold him to his word. Polydectes thought that while Perseus was away he might prevail upon Danae to listen to his suit; and it was more than probable that the young man would never return from the quest of Medusa's head, since neither Polydectes nor any one else could tell him

where the Gorgon dwelt. All they knew was that her name was Medusa, and that she dwelt with her two immortal sisters in a far land, near the Garden of the Hesperides and the Ocean stream. No mortal could approach them, because the glance of their eye turned into stone all things it fell upon. They were winged creatures, with snakes for hair, and no mortal man could live under the blight that they breathed forth. As Perseus walked by the sea-shore, making his way from the palace to the house where Dictys dwelt, he felt that the task he had undertaken was indeed impossible. Unless some god directed him to the place, he could never find it. Once there he felt he could trust in his own strength and courage, but he despaired of finding his way to a place from which no living thing had ever returned. He gazed upon the sea, pondering thus, when suddenly a woman stood before him, clad in beauteous armour of flashing silver, and looked at him with clear grey eyes that were, although he knew it not, marvellously like his own. Before their steady gaze he bowed his head: for he knew he was in the presence of one of the immortals. Then Athene, for it was she, bade him be of good hope. Her father Zeus had sent her to aid him, and Hermes, the messenger god, had given her gifts for him which would enable him to keep the rash promise that Polydectes had entrapped him into making. Then she gave him a pair of winged sandals, which would carry him tireless over land and sea, a helmet which made him invisible, and a sharp sword, shaped like a sickle, which the lame god, Hephaestus, had fashioned. To these gifts Athene herself added a shield. Then she told him he must go northward, beyond all the habitations of men, until he reached a spot which she described to him.

Mightily cheered, Perseus armed himself with the magic weapons, and prepared to set forth. First he advised his mother, before he said farewell to her, that she should take refuge in Athene's sanctuary: if she were a sweeper of the temple there Polydectes could not molest her. Then he tenderly took leave of Danae and started on his journey, following the directions which Athene had given him. First he flew, on his winged shoes, beyond Thessaly and across the forests of the Danube and the Rhine. Over the great plains he sped and above the chill northern seas, until, after many days and nights, he reached a terrible deserted plain where no sun or moon ever shone. It lay for ever in a kind of dreary twilight, cold and grey and dim. There, near the oily tideless sea the Graiae dwelt, three ancient maidens, pale of face and grey of hair, whom the sun had never warmed or gladdened. They were sisters to the more awful Gorgons, and they alone knew where these others dwelt. Around them the dolphins played and the cold sea moaned. They had but one eye between them, and one tooth. Athene had told Perseus that he must steal that eye and so compel the Graiae to guide him to where the Gorgons were. He found them seated in their palace, singing a dismal chant with their broken voices. One of them heard his footsteps and called to her sister to pass her the eye. 'Give me the eye that I may see him,' she shrieked; and the other cried, 'Give me the tooth that I may kill him.' Swift as lightning Perseus intercepted the passing of the eye from one wrinkled hand to the other: in the moment when all three were blind he snatched it away. At first the Graiae did not understand what had happened. They still cried, 'Give me the eye,' 'Give me the eye,' 'Give me the tooth,' until at last they realized that



THE RODANINI MEDUSA

the invisible stranger had stolen it. Then they joined in a hideous wailing, crying to him to give them back their eye. Perseus declared he would give it up on one condition only: that they should tell him how to get to the drear abode of their sisters, the Gorgons. Again the Graiae shrieked, and begged him, for his own sake, to ask them anything but this. Perseus was firm; unless they told him they had lost their eye for ever, and were plunged in unbroken darkness for all time. So at last they gave way. They described to him the long, difficult journey, and told him how to start upon it. Then at last Perseus handed back the eye, and started off again. This time he flew south as far as he had already come north. Over Spain he flew and beyond the Pillars of Hercules, until, after travelling far and wide he came to the shores of Oceanus. There, hard by the kingdom of Night, on a terrible desolate plain, surrounded by blasted trees and rocks worn by the sea into innumerable caves, the Gorgons dwelt. Snakes crawled about everywhere, and huge, horrible birds flew hither and thither with ear-piercing screams. All around the place flowed the ocean stream, its waters as slow and grey as lead. As Perseus approached, with his cap of invisibility on his head, he saw two women seated there asleep and a third pacing up and down, crying and moaning continually. Then he knew that the sleepers were the two immortal sisters, Stheno and Euryale, withered hags, hideous as sin: while the other, whose beautiful form was wreathed in horrid snakes, which curled in and out, hissing amidst her beauteous hair, was Medusa, her whom he had come to slay. Athene had warned him that he must not look upon her face: but as he drew near her softly from behind he could see from the reflection in the shield which the goddess had given him that

it was of strange and awful loveliness. With averted head he struck a clean strong blow, and smote the terrible lovely head clean off. Then, without looking at it for an instant, he thrust it into the leathern wallet that hung by his side and fled from the place. As Medusa perished she uttered a fearful shriek. At the sound her two immortal sisters awoke from their sleep and rose to search for and pursue the enemy. But Perseus fled, unseen, on his winged shoes, which carried him swiftly over land and sea, far from the hideous and dread abode of the Gorgons, and brought him in safety to the habitations of men once more. For the night he rested, but as morning rose he started off again, for he longed to be in Seriphus once more after his long absence. On his journey he came to Aethiopia, and as he sped along the coast he saw a sight which made his heart stand still. He had reached a region where the rich pasture-land ran down to form great, rugged cliffs, which jutted out into the sea. Against their steep sides the waves dashed, throwing up great clouds of spray. There at one point he saw a white object, which he discovered, as he drew nearer, was not, as he had thought, a mass of heaped-up foam, but a human form, fastened to the rocks. As he came on he saw, to his inexpressible horror and amazement, that it was a young girl of matchless beauty, chained hand and foot to the sharp rock. She stood where a long spit of stone ran out into the sea, upon which the tide was rising rapidly. And as she gazed around her he saw that her face was agonized and terror-struck. Perseus approached with his helmet on—invisible. No other human being was in sight. As he drew closer and closer the maiden seemed to him more and more beautiful, and there was something in her face which called to him as no woman's face had

ever done. He felt that he must know why she stood thus chained and miserable, for he resolved to set her free if he might. Casting off his helmet, he spoke to her gently and reverently, and asked her to tell him why she was there. The maiden wept bitterly, and told him that she was Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus, king of that land, and of his queen Cassiopeia. Cassiopeia had proudly boasted that her daughter was fairer than the children of Nereus. Poseidon, enraged by this insolence, sent a terrible punishment. The sea rose and rose, higher and higher each day, until it seemed that all the land would be flooded. Worst of all, out of its depths there arose, at each high tide, an awful monster, like nothing ever seen by man, which destroyed everything within its reach. When the king asked the oracle how he might save his land from this horrible doom, the priest replied that the floods would rise and rise, and the monster would destroy his people utterly unless he gave his daughter to be devoured by it. At first the king refused, but at last, seeing that his people were being utterly destroyed, he gave way. That day they had brought Andromeda and chained her to the rock, and now, as the tide rose, she was waiting for the awful monster to come and devour her. Indeed, as she ended her story she gave a shriek and pointed with her hand. There, rising out of the slimy ooze at the water's brink, they saw a hideous creature, a thing of nameless horror ; it came on bellowing, as if with horrid joy at the thought of its prey. Perseus drew his sword, and, cutting the thongs that bound Andromeda to the rock, set her free. Then, bidding her climb up the cliff so as to be out of danger, he advanced with his falchion ready to attack the monster. It came on, roaring loudly, but Perseus, nothing daunted, sprang at it, and attacking

it from the side, planted a deadly blow in the coils of its huge neck. Then, as the black blood poured forth, he plunged his sword again and again, till the bellowing died away, and the monster lay dead at his feet. In triumph he returned to where Andromeda had stood watching the fight with wildly beating heart, and threw at her feet the hideous head of the beast. As their eyes met they knew they loved each other. Thus, when Perseus came with her to her father's court and Cepheus asked how he could reward him for the service he had done, Perseus replied that the only reward he would value would be the hand of Andromeda in marriage. When Cepheus found that his daughter was willing, he consented gladly, and after the wedding had been celebrated with much pomp Perseus returned to Seriphus, bringing Andromeda with him.

On his arrival he found that Polydectes had so persecuted his mother that she had taken refuge in Athene's temple. On the very day when he landed the unrighteous king had come with armed men to carry her off, even from the precincts of the goddess. There Perseus came upon them. He found his mother clinging to the image of the goddess, Dictys alone standing with drawn sword to protect her against the king and his men. When Polydectes saw Perseus he ordered his men to slay him, but Perseus took from the wallet by his side the Gorgon's fatal head and held it up before the king and his men, so that their eyes were on it. Then as they gazed, unable to turn away, an awful change came over them. Their limbs stiffened, their eyes became glazed, no sound came from between their parted lips, their outstretched arms were rigid and their weapons dropped from their fingers. All there were turned to stone save Dictys and Danae.

Then Perseus left Dictys to rule over Seriphus. His mother he took with him down to his ship, where Andromeda was waiting for them, and together they sailed for Argos, to win the great inheritance which his mother had told him awaited him there. But the winds blew them from their course, so that when they landed at last they found that they were in Thessaly. There at Larissa the king was celebrating games, in which he invited Perseus to take part. In throwing the discus the hero accidentally hit one of the other competitors, and when he ran to find out how the man fared, he lay dead upon the ground. Then the people told Perseus that he was Acrisius, king of Argos.

Thus was the prophecy fulfilled which declared that Acrisius should die at the hands of Danae's son. Perseus was sorely grieved, and after burying his grandfather with all due honours he offered the dominion over Argos to his cousin Megapenthes, son of Proetus, in exchange for Tiryns, since he was fain not to rule over the land of a murdered king. Megapenthes accepted, and Perseus built the city of Mycenae, where he dwelt in great happiness with Andromeda.

CHAPTER V

HERACLES

AMONG all the heroes whom Athene loved, the first place assuredly must be given to Heracles, the most famous of all Grecian heroes. The Dorian peoples boasted that their kings were descended from Heracles, but he was as greatly honoured by the Ionians in Athens, by the Achaeans, and the peoples that dwelt in Opus and in Thebes, and we may in fact call him the national hero of Greece. Godlike—for Zeus was his father—he was yet a man, only stronger, braver, and more daring than other men. He suffered from all the ills and sorrows of mortals; his passions were mortal, and their strength constantly brought him into trouble and difficulty. One story tells how when quite a youth he was offered the choice between pleasure and glory. He might have either the easy life of enjoyment, without effort or stress, or days passed in toil and service, crowned at the end by fame. Heracles chose the latter, and his whole life was spent in continual striving. He had many enemies to contend with: greatest among them the mighty queen of heaven, who hated and pursued him all his life, and from whom he acquired his name, for Heracles, some say, means ‘famous on account of Hera’: not least himself, for his fiery temper and headstrong feelings were for ever leading him astray; but he was victorious in the end. Thus, those who believed that every man had in him something godlike, some spark sent by the gods, saw in Heracles a proof of the truth of their faith.

Heracles came into the world under the ban of the jealousy of Hera. His father, Amphitryon, king of

Tiryns, son of Alcaeus, and grandson of Perseus, had been driven from his kingdom and compelled to take refuge with Creon, king of Thebes. When Hera heard that Amphitryon's wife, Alcmene, was about to have a child, she was very wroth, because Zeus, she knew, had looked upon the beauteous Alcmene with love. Fair women, dear to Zeus, were hateful to his queen, who ever wished them harm. Her anger waxed very great when, the day having come on which the birth of Alcmene's child was expected, Zeus declared to the Olympians that a descendant of the seed of Perseus was about to see the light, who should rule over all the lands belonging to that mighty family. When Hera pretended to disbelieve him, Zeus swore his unbreakable oath that it should be so. Then did his queen outwit him. Sthenelus, son of Perseus, and uncle of Amphitryon, was king in Argos, and his wife likewise was expecting a child. Hera caused the son of Sthenelus to come into the world before the son of Alcmene, so that the word of Zeus might apply to him. Thus it came to pass that Eurystheus, though weakly and infirm, was by the irrevocable decree of Zeus fated to rule over all the lands under the lordship of the house of Perseus, while Heracles, Alcmene's son, had to do him service and toil at his behest.

Heracles grew up, beautiful and strong. While yet a mere infant he showed how wondrous was the power of his hands and how great his courage. One day as he and his twin brother Iphicles were sleeping, two great serpents crept out into the chamber. Slowly and stealthily they rose and wound themselves, coil upon coil, round the cradle where the babies lay, raising their evil heads high on either side and hissing softly, as they prepared to plant their deadly fangs in the infants as they slept, while they smothered them in a deadly

embrace. All the house was quiet ; there was no one at hand to see or save the children. Suddenly Iphicles awoke, and his wild screams roused his brother. Heracles seized each snake with a hand and compressed their necks, just below the head, with such tremendous force that they were powerless. Undismayed by their forked tongues and the awful glare of the eyes, which were darting from their heads as they were throttled, he tightened his iron grip. By the time the screams of Iphicles had awakened the household and brought the servants running in, the hideous snakes lay dead upon the ground, while Heracles had calmly lain down to sleep again. Thus he escaped the first great peril that Hera sent against him.

Heracles grew up, taller and stronger than any of his companions, unsurpassed in all manly arts. The best teachers and tutors gladly assisted his father in his training, for he was a pupil to rejoice the heart of any master. Amphytryon himself instructed him in chariot driving, Autolycus taught him to wrestle, Eurytus to shoot with the bow, and Castor to use the other weapons of war. But the best of his tutors was the wise old centaur Chiron, to whose school on Mount Pelion so many of the heroes of Greece came in their youth, to learn the art and practice of noble life. Chiron was altogether unlike his wild brethren. When after the battle with the Lapithae, they were driven from Mount Pelion, he left them and made his home in a cave there. On the mountain-sides his pupils practised all the arts of hunting and the chase ; they learned to be skilful in the use of weapons, to be bold, hardy, careless of comfort, and able to endure every kind of privation and overcome every kind of difficulty. Chiron trained their minds as well as their bodies ; from his wise discourse they learned daily how to bear themselves

with honour. As he had taught Asclepius, so he taught Heracles and many more the art of healing. Castor and Polydeuces, the twin sons of Zeus and Leda, had been among Chiron's pupils; so had Actaeon, the mighty hunter, who perished, torn to pieces by his own hounds, because he boasted that he had seen Artemis bathing. Jason¹ came to him later.

Heracles was quick to learn, but he could not bear to be corrected. His temper was violent and even dangerous. One day when Linus, his master in music, found fault with him, he seized the lyre, and, forgetting his mighty strength, struck his teacher such a blow with it that Linus fell dead at his feet.

A temper so uncontrollable alarmed the good Amphitryon. He therefore banished his unruly son to the slopes of Mount Cithaeron, there to tend his flocks, for he hoped that the peaceful life of the country might calm him and teach him self-control. It was here that Pleasure and Glory appeared to Heracles, and commanded him to make his choice between them. At this time all the shepherds on Mount Cithaeron were in great distress on account of a prodigious lion which used to descend upon their flocks and ravage them. The beast was so fierce and strong that none dared attack him. Meantime they were being ruined by the damage done to their flocks. When Heracles heard this he scorned the shepherds for their cowardice. 'What!' he cried, 'do you sit shivering within your huts and leave your poor silly sheep to face a destroying monster! Tell me where the lion is to be found, that I may teach him to be afraid of me.' The young man's pride and boastfulness, and the scorn he showed for themselves, angered the herdsmen. They told him where the lion lay, and many secretly chuckled as they saw Heracles set off, alone,

¹ See chapter vi.

for he refused the company of those who would have gone with him, unarmed save for the club he bore over his shoulder. As the day went on and he did not return, they said to one another, 'Pride goeth before a fall.' But when evening came and they sat gathered round the fire, suddenly the vast form of Heracles darkened the doorway. He said nothing, but threw down before them the hide of the lion, still damp and bleeding. 'There is my winter's cloak,' he said.

Soon after this Heracles returned home and assisted Creon, the friend of his father, in war against the king of Orchomenus. In this campaign he performed great feats, and freed Thebes from the tribute which the city had formerly had to pay. As a mark of his gratitude Creon gave the young hero his daughter Megara as his wife. For some time Heracles and Megara lived happily with their children, until the unsleeping hatred of Hera again broke out against him. In a frenzy, which she set upon him, Heracles took up his bow and aimed his deadly unerring arrows at all who came near, and thus, horrible to relate, he slew his own little children. Great was his grief when he recovered from his madness, and he at once made his way to Delphi to ask the priestess of Apollo there how he could purify himself of his sin. She told him that he must fulfil the decree of Fate; he must go to Eurystheus, king of Mycenae, and perform whatever tasks might be set him. This was the punishment Hera had in store for him. At the same time the priestess told him that good should come of the evil; by his labours he should win immortal fame, and, at the last, be admitted to Olympus itself.

Sadly then did Heracles depart to Mycenae, but not without hope. He saw good at the end of his sorrows, and he had by him mighty helpers and servers; the grey-eyed goddess, Athene, had him ever near her heart

in all his labours and troubles, and Zeus, his great father, was mindful of his son.

Eurystheus was delighted when he found Heracles thus delivered, as it were, into his power, and at once set him to work on the most difficult and direful tasks he could discover, tasks which it seemed indeed impossible to accomplish. First, he bade Heracles go forth and slay the Nemean lion which was ravaging the land for miles around Mycenae. This lion was more terrible than the beast of Cithaeron, because he was the offspring of two supernatural monsters ; his mother was Echidna, half maiden, half snake, and his father Typhoeus, the youngest child of Gaia, the earth-goddess, and himself a giant with a hundred serpent heads. Typhoeus was a fiery power, dwelling in the innermost parts of the earth, belching forth fire and smoke through the craters of volcanoes. The lion which Heracles was commanded to slay dwelt within a dark impenetrable cavern, whither it used to retire after one of its destructive sallies. No one had ever dared to follow it into its lair. Weapons were of no avail, for the beast's hide was an armour that nothing could pierce ; all previous attempts to shoot at it with poisoned arrows had failed miserably. Heracles set out, armed only with his club, and boldly approached the animal, which, cowed by the undaunted eye the hero fixed upon it, began to retire into its cavern. Heracles drove it before him, step by step, until, when they were well within the cave, he suddenly advanced upon the beast, and grappling with it, seized it round the throat with his mighty arms with such tremendous force that he strangled it. Then he stripped off the hide and fashioned from it a garment for himself of more worth than any armour smith ever made, the mighty jaws forming his helmet.

The Nemean lion was not the only one among the brood

of Gaia and Typhocus fateful to men. In the swamp of Lerna, near Argos, there dwelt a hydra—a monster with nine heads, one of which was deathless, and all so poisonous that the breath that came from these mouths was instantly fatal to all who drew near. When Heracles returned after slaying the lion, Eurystheus immediately commanded him to rid the land of this pestilent hydra, thinking that here was a task none could fulfil. So long as the monster remained in the marsh Heracles could not get near to attack it. At last he took his arrows and dipped them in burning pitch, then he shot them, all flaming, at the hydra, in quick succession, until it was driven out of the swamp on to the solid ground. There Heracles attacked it. But as he cut off its heads one after the other, he saw to his dismay two new heads grow up for each that he cut off; and then he understood that one man could not hope to destroy the hydra single-handed. So he summoned his charioteer Iolaus, the son of his twin-brother Iphicles, and as Hercules cut off the heads one after another, Iolaus stood by and seared the wounds with burning brands, so that they could not grow again. Thus they cut off all save the immortal head, and upon it they piled a huge mass of rock that held it down and crushed it. When the hydra was thus destroyed, Heracles dipped each of his arrows in its poisonous gall, so that no medicine or skill of physician could heal the wounds they made. Then he returned to Eurystheus. Eurystheus, however, said that, since Heracles had been helped by Iolaus, the exploit did not count, and commanded him to capture and bring alive to Mycenae the Erymanthian boar, which was destroying the people and land of Arcadia, and doing to them all the damage that the Nemean lion had brought upon the Mycenaeans. Heracles set forth. On his way he passed by Mount

Pholoe, where Pholus, one of the centaurs, dwelt in a cave. There he guarded a cask of rare wine which had been given to him and his brethren by the god Dionysus. Pholus now opened the cask in honour of his guest. The strong scent of the rare vintage floated out of the cave, and on the warm night air the other centaurs, dwelling far and near, perceived it. Furious at finding their priceless wine dispensed to a mere man, they rushed into the cave, armed with masses of living rock and great trees, which they had torn up by the roots, and fell upon Heracles, who was sitting by the fire. At first he tried to drive them off by picking up burning brands out of the fire and hurling them at the centaurs. When that did not answer, and they still came on, Heracles took his bow and shot the deadly arrows which he dipped in the poisonous blood of the hydra. Some were slain, others, among them by mistake poor Chiron, were wounded; the rest fled. Pholus too lay dead. He had let one of the arrows fall on his own foot, and thus perished. Heracles then continued his chase of the boar. Further and further he drove the animal before him, until it was tired out. At last, in the far north, when he had driven it into a vast field of deep snow, where it could not move fast, he flung a noose over its head and so captured it.

Eurystheus, who had commanded him to bring the boar home alive, was so terror-struck when he saw the dreadful beast, which Heracles led in his noose up the very steps of the palace, that he fled from the sight of it, and hid himself for safety in a tub in the underground regions of the palace. Not till Heracles had removed the boar did the king recover his presence of mind; then he bade his kinsman go forth again and bring him—but this time only to the city gates—the hind with horns of gold and hooves of brass, which had

been dedicated to Artemis by one of the star maidens, known as the Pleiades. The hind had escaped from the temple, and was now wandering wild in the northern regions of Arcadia. For a whole year Heracles pursued it into the far northern lands, where the Danube rises and the Hyperboreans dwelt, at the back of the north wind, in a country of which no man had ever brought back certain tidings, but where it was said that the sun only rose and set once a year. In the darkness of winter Apollo had once visited these people, coming in a chariot drawn by swans, and returning to Delphi with the summer. In this northern land Heracles knew he could never entrap the hind, but when she returned to Arcadia in the summer he succeeded in wounding her with an arrow, and so brought her to Mycenae in triumph. Eurystheus, however, soon sent him back to Arcadia. The lake of Stymphalus then was the home of a terrible brood of man-eating birds. Their claws, wings, and beaks were all of brass, so were their feathers, which they shot out like arrows with deadly effect. When Eurystheus sent Heracles against them he took with him a mighty brazen rattle. When he swung it round his head it made such an appalling din that the birds rose and flew away in alarm, far away from the lake. Some Heracles killed as they flew; the rest settled again inland on the distant shores of the Black Sea.

On the borders of that sea there dwelt a nation of women warriors, called Amazons, because these maidens cut off the right breast in order the better to handle the bow. They allowed no men to dwell in their land, it was said, and any male children born were exposed, only the girls being brought up. To their queen Hippolyta, Ares, her father, had given a girdle of matchless beauty, the report of which travelled far and wide.

Admete, the daughter of King Eurystheus, heard of this girdle, and longed to possess it; her father therefore commanded Hercules, as his next task, to fetch it. Hippolyta received Hercules in friendly fashion, and was ready to hand over the girdle to him. But Hera was not well pleased to think that his task should be accomplished so easily, and, in order to frustrate him, she put it into the minds of the Amazons that Heracles intended to do some harm to their queen, and that they would do well to slay him. In the battle that followed, however, Hippolyta and many of the Amazons were slain, while Hercules got away unscathed with the girdle. On his way home he came by Troy, and found the king and people of that land in dire distress. Apollo and Poseidon had helped King Laomedon, son of Ilus, to build the walls of his town—Ilium—strong and high, but when the time came for payment, Laomedon had defrauded the gods. In vengeance, Apollo sent a sore plague upon the land, and Poseidon a sea monster, which ravaged and destroyed far and wide. The only way by which Laomedon could save his people was by sacrificing his daughter Hesione to the monster. When Heracles arrived the maiden was on the point of being handed over to the deadly serpent to devour. Laomedon implored the hero to save her, and offered to give him, in return, the magic steeds which Zeus had given to Tros, the grandfather of Laomedon, as ransom for the beauteous Ganymede, the eldest son of Tros. Zeus, enraptured by the young man's loveliness, had sent down his eagle to carry him off, and kept him in Olympus as his cupbearer. Heracles accepted the bargain, slew the monster and set the maiden free. But Laomedon again was faithless. For the last time, however. Heracles collected men, destroyed his city, and slew Laomedon, with all his sons save Priam. This

was the fate of another ungrateful monarch who tried to defraud the hero of the promised reward of his exploits, namely Augeas, king of Elis. He owned immense wealth in Elis, as well as great herds of oxen and flocks of sheep, more than three thousand in number. Among his oxen were twelve white bulls, which sometimes drew the chariot of the sun god. The farmyard of Augeas had not been cleansed for years until Eurystheus sent Heracles to him. Then Augeas said that, if he could cleanse his yard in a single day, he should have a tenth of all his flocks. He made the promise thus lightly because he thought the task an impossible one. But Heracles was not only strong, he was wise. What no man could accomplish could be done easily by the forces of nature. Therefore he devoted his strength to turning the course of the river Alpheus, and sent all its rush of waters sweeping through the yard. In this manner, dirt and dung of years was cleansed away in a few moments. Heracles then removed the dam he had built, and conducted the waters back into their course. Thus, when Augeas came at the end of the day, the impossible had been performed, and Heracles claimed his reward. Augeas refused. Heracles, he said, had only done what Eurystheus had commanded; he was not entitled to any payment for it. For this Augeas paid dearly. Heracles collected an army, defeated the Eleans, and slew Augeas and his sons.

Heracles next crossed to Crete, and captured the mad bull that was ravaging the island. He swam across the sea on the animal's back, and then, throwing it over his neck, carried it to Mycenae, where he let it go. He was then commanded by Eurystheus to bring him the mares belonging to Diomedes, king of Thrace, and the red oxen of Geryones, who dwelt in the far west, on the borders of the ocean stream.

On his way to Thrace, Heracles passed through the realm of that pious Admetus, king of Pherae, whom Apollo had once served as a herdsman, and at this palace he paused and was hospitably entertained. Soon, however, he discovered that a great grief weighed upon the king and all his people. In token of his respect for Admetus, Apollo had declared that when the king's hour struck he need not die, if some one else could be found willing to take his place. Death had summoned Admetus, but his wife Alcestis had at once stepped forward and given her life for his. It was for her that Admetus' halls were mourning; she had died only that morning. Heracles was deeply touched by the friendly hospitality which took him in and looked after him in the midst of such distress, and he resolved to requite it. A few hours later, as Admetus sat sorrowing by his hearth, he raised his eyes and beheld Heracles again before him, with a woman's muffled form resting on his arm. He explained to the king that, since he, no doubt, intended to take another wife in place of Alcestis, he begged his protection for this maiden. Admetus declared that he could never marry again; that if it were possible he would now die in order to bring Alcestis back to life; without her, existence was worth nothing to him. Then Heracles removed the veil which hid the woman's face, and revealed Alcestis herself, still in a trance, but alive. The hero had snatched her from the very jaws of the underworld—how Admetus must not ask—and brought her back to him. From what Admetus had just said, he saw that he was more worthy of so noble a wife than he had been before.

Heracles then went on his way till he came to the land ruled over by king Diomedes. The prince used to feed his savage mares on the bodies of strangers who came to Thrace. After a tremendous fight Heracles

slew him and cast his corpse to the steeds, which he then brought to Mycenae. There Eurystheus, who had no notion how to manage them, let them go.

To reach the land where the oxen of Geryones were pasturing, guarded by a shepherd and his dog, Heracles had to pass right through Europe, across the sea where Gibraltar now stands. He met with many adventures on the way, and where he crossed the sea he set up the two great pillars, to be the gateway of the Mediterranean Sea, and to record for all men, who afterwards might cross from Europe to Africa, the fact that Heracles had been before them. Thence he went boldly on and penetrated into the heart of the unknown regions of Africa, until he reached the great ocean stream, the river of the world which, the Greeks believed, flowed round and bound together earth and sea, itself unbounded and flowing back into itself. On an island on the far side of this lay the pastures where the oxen fed. As Heracles stood looking across, the sun god, who had risen in the morning and bathed his four snowy fire-breathing steeds in a lovely eastern bay, where the blameless Ethiopians dwelt, passed above him in the high heavens. The rays which he sent down were so hot that they vexed the weary and perplexed Heracles. Turning upon the all powerful sun god he drew his bow and shot up at him as he stood, all gold and gleaming in the sky, so dazzling that the eye could scarcely bear to face him. Helios, instead of being enraged—no weapon, of course, could hurt him— marvelled at the courage of the man who dared attack him, and demanded of Heracles why he was standing there. When the hero replied that he was seeking to get across the ocean stream, the sun god lent him, for that purpose, the golden boat, shaped like a bowl, which had been made for him by the rare skill of Hephaestus. In this Heracles easily made his way over

the stream. Once landed on the island he soon slew the shepherd and the dog which guarded the cattle, and began to drive them off. When Geryones heard what had happened, he hurried wildly in pursuit. But he was no match for Heracles, who slew him with his arrows, and went on his way, driving the red cattle before him. Through Spain, Gaul, Liguria, Italy, and Sicily he journeyed, overcoming all the manifold difficulties and perils that beset him on the way. At the mouth of the Rhone he only escaped death by the interposition of Zeus. The wild and savage tribes who dwelt there attacked him in such numbers that his arrows were exhausted, and he himself about to sink, worn out, upon the earth, when Zeus sent down a great shower of stones, which scattered the foe far and wide. When Heracles had reached Greece once more and was bringing the cattle over the Thracian mountain passes, Hera, always his relentless enemy, sent a gadfly to vex the oxen. Maddened by its stings, the herd scattered in all directions, and it was only after the greatest exertion that Heracles managed to bring the larger part together again. Then, as he was bringing them across the Thracian Isthmus, Alcioneus, a mighty giant, cast down a vast piece of rock, which crushed some of the oxen to death. When the giant next hurled a rock at Heracles himself he struck it back with his club, so that Alcioneus was killed by his own blow. Then at last Mycenae was reached: and Eurystheus sacrificed the oxen to his patroness Hera.

Heracles had now performed ten of his twelve appointed tasks; two of the most arduous still awaited him.

Eurystheus commanded him to bring him the golden apples growing in the garden of the Hesperides. In this garden Zeus had wooed and wedded Hera, and in it

stood a tree which Gaia, the earth mother, had caused to put forth apples of pure gold, as her marriage gift for the queen of heaven. The garden was therefore a most sacred spot, hidden from the eyes and knowledge of mortal men. Nothing more was known of it than that it lay at the outermost borders of the earth, close to the borders of eternal darkness, where the patient Atlas stood, bearing the burden of the firmament upon his shoulders. Heracles could obtain no directions as to how to get there. In his doubt he betook him to the nymphs who dwelt by the river Eridanus, for these fair creatures were ever ready to render help and wise counsel to those in difficulty. Although they could not tell him how to reach the garden, they counselled him to ask Nereus, the all wise, venerable sea god. Heracles found the old man in the splendid cave where he dwelt in the depths of the Aegean. At first Nereus would not speak, but at last he gave way and sent Heracles forth on his long journey. For many weary months he travelled on and on, encountering fearful difficulties on the way. In Libya he was met by a mighty giant, Antaeus by name, the son of earth, who grew stronger every time he fell and touched his mother soil, so that no one could defeat him. It was Antaeus' custom to compel all strangers who passed his way to wrestle with him, and since they were invariably conquered and slain, no traveller had ever passed him. But the strength of Heracles was not as that of other men : with one arm he lifted the huge form of Antaeus off the ground and held him so, aloft, until he had slain him. In the same way he overcame all the dangers of the journey, and passing through Egypt and Ethiopia he crossed to Asia and climbed over the Caucasus Mountains. There he found Prometheus hanging, chained to the rock, and suffering pangs, which every

day renewed, from the eagle, which tore and consumed his entrails with its cruel beak. Heracles, moved with pity, shot the eagle. Prometheus then told him how best to get the apples, and he passed on, through the land at the back of the north wind, until he came to the spot where Atlas stood. Then, as Prometheus advised, he offered to bear Atlas' burden for a time, if he would go into the enchanted garden, which he, being an immortal, could enter without fear or danger, and bring back the apples. When Atlas returned with the fruit, he laughed at the idea of taking up his burden again. 'No, no,' he said. 'You shall keep it, while I take Eurystheus his apples!' Heracles looked at him for a moment, without making any objection. 'Very well,' he replied, 'but my neck is not so thick as yours: I must arrange a cushion for it. Do you hold the earth for a moment while I make all comfortable.' The simple Atlas fell into his own trap, and Heracles sped off in triumph with the apples.

Eurystheus had no use for the apples: he had only sought to impose upon Heracles a task too difficult for the hero to perform: so he told his kinsman that he might keep the fruit. Heracles accordingly dedicated the golden apples to his patroness Athene. She accepted them, and restored them to the garden whence they came.

The twelfth and last task was the most severe of all, for Heracles was commanded to descend into the realm of Hades, the abode of the spirits of the dead. It lay beneath the earth, beyond the bounds of the ocean stream. Persephone ruled over the outer courts, a region veiled in darkness and cloud, where the sun never shone, and no flowers grew save the dreary asphodel, the blossom of the grave: no trees, save barren willows and poplars. Beyond lay Erebus,

a place of utter and absolute darkness, where the unhallowed powers of the underworld held their seats. From this place Heracles was bidden to bring to the upper world Cerberus, the three-headed dog, which guarded the entrance. Cerberus was the son of Typhoeus and Echidna; the hair of his heads was composed of snakes, as was also his tail. He gave a friendly welcome to the spirits coming into the realms of night, but, if any one tried to get away thence, he would seize on him and hold him fast. No living man could descend alone into the realm of Hades: Athene and Hermes therefore accompanied Heracles to one of the entrances—a great cavernous hollow at the promontory of Taenarum, in the Peloponnese—and led him down into the infernal regions. The first person whom he beheld was Theseus, his one time companion in arms, and him he set free. When he approached Hades, the ruler of the place called by his name, the monarch grimly told him he might take the three-headed dog to the upper region, if he could do so without using any weapons, and would return him unhurt. The task seemed an impossible one: but even as he looked at the hideous dog, snarling with all his three heads, Heracles' courage did not fail. He had never yet found any task beyond his strength. Now, by sheer muscular force, he grasped Cerberus in so iron a grip that the dog could not resist him. Held out thus at arm's length, Heracles brought him to the upper air, gnashing his teeth and foaming at all his mouths. Where drops of the foam fell on to the soil the poisonous flowers of the aconite sprang up. To see the dog was enough for Eurystheus. He admitted that the impossible had been performed, and bade Heracles restore the beast to its dark home without delay.

This done, the long and arduous labours were at an

end. Heracles was free to return to Thebes. There he gave Megara, his first wife, in marriage to his faithful comrade Iolaus. The two had long loved one another, and into the heart of Heracles himself a new passion had entered. He had seen Iole, the fair daughter of that king Eurytus, who had once taught him the use of bow and arrow, and now that he was free he at once set out for his court in northern Oechalia. But Eurytus mocked at his suit when, after defeating him and his sons in a shooting match, the hero asked for the hand of Iole as his reward. Then Iphitus, the son of Eurytus, who was friendly to Heracles' desires, advised him that his father could deny nothing to the man who should restore him the cattle of which he had been robbed by one Autolycus. Eurytus indeed suspected Heracles of the theft, and was therefore implacable against him. Heracles at once set off with Iphitus on the search. At Tiryns, however, the madness with which Hera had before afflicted the hero came again upon him; in the frenzy of his rage he threw Iphitus from the battlements of the town, and the unhappy man perished on the spot. Heracles' hopes of winning Iole were now further from fulfilment than ever, and a heavy punishment was laid upon him for the murder of her brother. For three years he served as a household drudge in the halls of Omphale, queen of Lydia, doing all the menial tasks of a female slave. When he was at last released he did not seek a life of ease or wish to spend his days in quiet. Effort was to him the breath of life; he must be for ever doing and undertaking something new. Gladly did he obey the summons of Athene, when she called upon him to assist in the war against the rebellious giants, since a prophecy had foretold that the gods could only finally subdue the giants with the aid of a mortal. Heracles, too, was one of

the heroes who set forth with Jason¹ on the quest of the Golden Fleece. Later Heracles lent his aid to Meleager,² prince of Calydon, in the hunt of the boar sent by Artemis. In Calydon he met Deianeira, the gentle sister of Meleager and of Tydeus; and Deianeira loved him the moment their eyes met. Her hand was sought in marriage by Achelous, the river god, eldest of the three thousand sons of old Oceanus and the nymph Tethys. Heracles fought with Achelous, and at last defeated him, although the god changed his form rapidly from that of a man to that of a bull. In the latter shape Heracles broke off one of his horns, and so conquered him. After his marriage with Deianeira, Heracles remained in Calydon, where his son Hyllus was born, until his friend Ceyx, ruler of Trachis, begged him to visit his court. Heracles therefore set forth with his wife and son. To reach Trachis they had to cross a river, which was guarded by the centaur Nessus, who used to convey travellers over it on his back. Nessus took the opportunity to attempt to carry off Deianeira, to whom he proffered his love as he bore her over. Heracles at once shot at him with a poisoned arrow, and stretched the centaur dying on the beach. Before he expired Nessus called to Deianeira and bade her take some of the blood oozing from the wound, where the arrow had pierced him, for it would act as a charm to restore her husband's affection, should he ever cease to care for her or prefer another woman. Not long after Deianeira remembered his words. Ceyx received his visitors with most generous hospitality, and urged them to make their home with him. For a long time they remained in Trachis, until Heracles set forth again on warlike purpose. The king of the Dorians had called for his help against his old enemy Eurytus of

¹ See chapter vi.

² See chapter vii.

Oechalia. The war was completely successful. The fortress of Eurytus was stormed, and Heracles at last carried off Iole as his prisoner. He had long ceased to care for her, but when Deianeira heard what had occurred she was inflamed with a furious and unthinking jealousy. The gift of Nessus occurred to her mind. As Heracles was preparing on the cliffs of Mount Ceneum to offer sacrifice to his father Zeus, in thankfulness for his victory, Lichas arrived with a message from Deianeira. In her joy at her husband's triumph, she bade Lichas say, she sent him a rich robe, which for her sake she begged him to put on. Heracles had hardly clothed himself in the robe, which had been steeped by Deianeira in the centaur's blood, when his body began to thrill with strange and horrible sensation; wherever the poisoned fabric touched his skin the deadly juices entered into him with torturing pain. His flesh burned and his nerves were racked. Frantic and maddened with agony, he seized the unhappy messenger by the heels and flung him far into the sea. All his efforts to tear off the robe were vain: it clung to him as closely as his own skin, and, as he tore at it, the flesh came away, bleeding and inflamed. In anguish he made his way to Mount Oeta, where he had a great funeral pyre built for him, but none of his unhappy followers could bear to set light to it, until at last Poeas, the father of Philoctetes, took pity on him and kindled it. In return for this service, Heracles gave Poeas his bow and arrow. The flames arose, but before they had reached the hero's body the mourners saw a cloud descending from the sky, with thunder and lightning, in which the son of Zeus was carried up to heaven.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARGONAUTS

At festivals, or any other time when men gathered together, there was one story that the Greeks especially loved to hear—the tale of the heroes who sailed with Jason, Aeson's son, in the good ship Argo, on the quest of the Golden Fleece. Athene herself, it was told, looked with a friendly eye upon the expedition, and helped in the building of the ship, for many of the fifty noble heroes who set sail in it were very dear to her—Jason himself and Heracles, Tydeus, Peleus, and Meleager.

The voyage took place in the days before the Trojan war. It was the proud boast of many of the leaders who fought before Troy that their fathers had fought with Jason, and the beginning of the quest went back to the earliest days of Greek story.

Hellen, the son of Deucalion, wedded a nymph, and dwelt with her in Thessaly. Their son was Aeolus, from whom the Aeolian race claimed to be descended. Aeolus was in his turn the father of a great family, no less than seven sons and five daughters. Cretheus, the eldest son, founded the kingdom of Iolcus, Sisyphus, the second, ruled over Ephyra, Athamas, the third, was king of the Minyae near Orchomenus in Boeotia. Now Cretheus' eldest son, Aeson, knew that his crafty step-brother, Pelias, was bent on winning the kingdom for himself when old Cretheus died. He laid plots against the life of Aeson, and would have slain Jason, Aeson's youthful son, had not his father, seeing what was in the mind of

Pelias, secretly sent Jason away from Iolcus. A trusty serving-man conveyed the child to Mount Pelion, where the wise and good centaur, Chiron, dwelt, the same who had instructed Heracles and taught Castor and his twin brother, and who later instructed Achilles.¹ Under Chiron's wise care Jason grew up to manhood, skilled in all arts and warlike exercises. Chiron taught him well, and the youth was by nature of a high courage, but in his calm bravery there was a touch of cruelty; he had little pity for those who were weaker or more sensitive than himself. When he was full grown, tall, strong, and handsome, Chiron told him that he had taught him all he knew, and he bade the young man go down to Iolcus, do sacrifice to Poseidon there, and claim the inheritance to his father's kingdom. Jason set forth, not knowing that, meantime, Aeson had been driven forth by the wily Pelias, who now ruled in his stead. On his way down from the hills he had to cross a foaming mountain torrent. An aged crone was standing there, unable to get across, and no one had offered to help her, for her face was ugly and wrinkled, her dress mean and dirty. Jason saw her and lifting her up in his strong, young arms, carried her over the swirling waters with the greatest ease. When he put her gently down, lo, the aged hag had gone, and in her place there stood a woman so dazzlingly majestic that Jason turned away his eyes in sheer wonder at her; he knew that she was no mortal, but a goddess, even Hera herself.

In crossing the stream he had lost a sandal, and thus he appeared in the market-place of Iolcus with a leopard skin over his shoulders, upon which his long fair hair fell, two spears in his hand, and one foot unshod. When he came before the king, Pelias trembled, for he had

¹ See chapter ix.

been warned to fear the man who should come before him shoeless; he knew that his fear had come upon him when Jason stood up, undismayed by the armed men around him, and demanded to have his inheritance restored to him. Pelias had but one thought—to get rid of Jason: so he told him that he would resign the crown to him on one condition—that Jason should bring him the Golden Fleece.

Now this was the story of the Golden Fleece. Athamas, the third son of Aeolus, had won the love of Nephele, the goddess of the cloud. She, an immortal, stooped to wed a mortal, and gave him two children, a boy named Phrixus and a girl, Helle. Athamas, however, was unworthy of Nephele's love; he forgot her and took to wife a mortal woman named Ino. Thereupon the goddess left him in anger, and sent a drought upon the land as a punishment for his unfaithfulness. No rain fell from the sky, and all the springs and streams dried up. Ino knew that this was the work of Nephele, and she pretended that an oracle had told her that the only way to stay the drought was to sacrifice the king's two children. This she prepared to do, but Nephele sent a ram with a fleece of gold, which wafted the children away, through the air, on its back. As the ram flew over the sea, Helle fell off and was drowned, so from that time on the straits where she had fallen were called after her, the Hellespont. The ram bore her brother Phrixus safely to shore in the kingdom of Colchis on the Euxine, ruled over by the great magician Aeetes, brother of Circe and Pasiphae. Aeetes received Phrixus hospitably, and before long showed his affection for him by giving him his daughter in marriage. When he landed in Colchis, Phrixus had sacrificed the ram, and hung the golden fleece in a grove sacred to Ares, where

a sleepless dragon guarded it. In Greece, whither the news came, at last, of the manner in which Phrixus had wondrously escaped the death the wicked Ino had prepared for him, to steal the Golden Fleece was commonly spoken of as a thing quite impossible; to wish for it, was to wish, as we say, for the moon. Thus when Pelias commanded Jason to fetch the Golden Fleece, men looked at one another and understood what was in the king's mind.

Jason, however, was nothing daunted. He had everything to gain, nothing to lose. He was young, and full of eagerness for adventure. Moreover, an inner voice bade him be of good courage. In his dreams the goddesses, Hera and Athene, appeared to him and assured him of success.

The first task before him was to build a vessel for the voyage to the land which no Greek had ever seen, and whose whereabouts none knew, where the fleece hung; the second was to collect a company. Athene herself directed Argos, the builder, in making a vessel, which was called Argo, after him. Soon the ship rose fair and stately, with oars for fifty rowers; her timbers came from pine trees that had grown on Mount Pelion. In her prow the goddess set a piece of oak from the speaking oak-tree at Dodona, sacred to Zeus. There, in the god's oldest sanctuary, the priest and priestesses could tell the will of Zeus from the rustling of the leaves of the tree. Soon the vessel was ready, and as Jason looked at her fair sweeping lines, his heart swelled with pride, and he loved his vessel, which he felt sure was to bring him glory.

From all over Greece the heroes gathered, fain to accompany Jason on his quest. Heracles came, ever ready for new dangers. Castor and Polydeuces came,

the twin sons of Zeus and Leda, half-brothers of Helen, and Calais and Zetes, the sons of Boreas, god of the rude north wind. Another pair of brothers were Lynceus and Idas, cousins of the Dioscuri (for so Castor and his twin were named). Lynceus was so keen sighted that he could see even into the heart of the earth; Idas was said to be the strongest of all living men. Orpheus came, the wonderful musician, who could make trees and stones move with the magic of his lute, and tame the wild beasts of the forest. When Eurydice, his dearly loved wife, died from the bite of a serpent, Orpheus followed her into the lower world, where Persephone was so much moved by the sweetness of his song that she said Eurydice might follow him, as he returned to the world of the living, if only he did not look back at her, as she passed through the region of the dead. But Orpheus was so eager to see that Eurydice was really following that he looked back once, and she was lost to him for ever. From Calydon came Meleager and his brother Tydeus, dear to Athene, a hero of great strength and courage, though small of stature; and Amphiaraus of Argos, brave as Tydeus, but in no other way like him, for Tydeus was wild savage and reckless, Amphiaraus wise just and prudent. Peleus¹ also came, he whose marriage with the sea goddess Thetis had been attended by all the gods. With many more of no less note there came Mopsus, who had the gift of prophecy, and Idmon, likewise gifted, who came, although he foresaw that the expedition would lead him to his death.

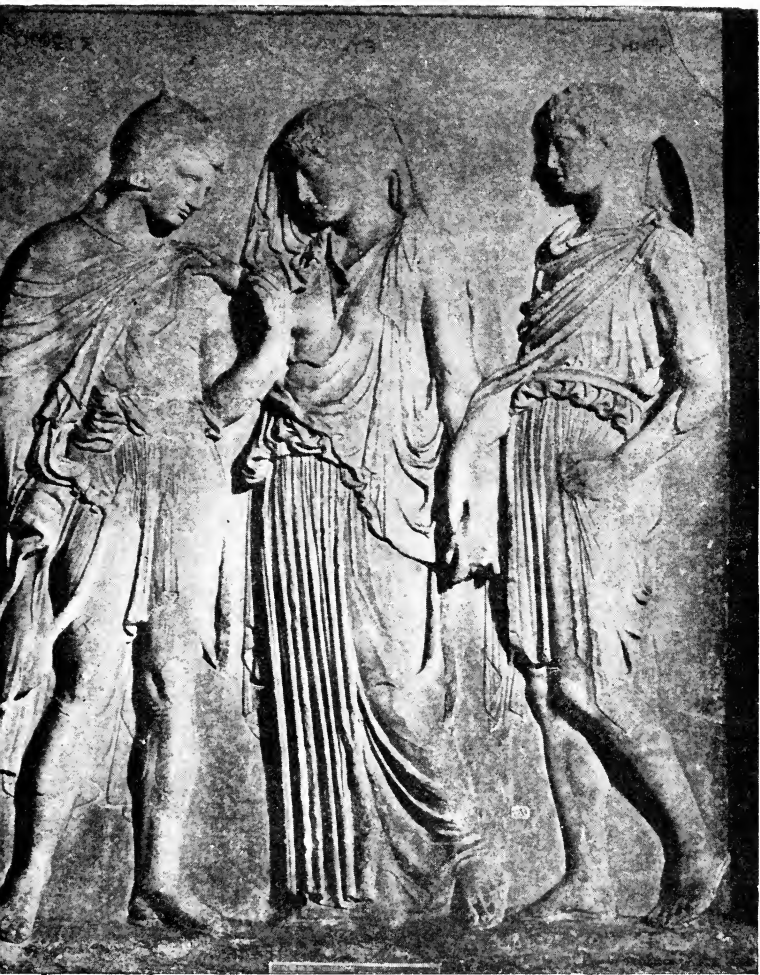
It was thus with a goodly company that the Argo sailed forth from Iolcus. The first halt was made at the island of Lemnos. Here they found a land peopled only by women, for they had risen and slain all the

¹ See chapter ix.

men. Hypsipyle, the queen, alone had spared her father, Thoas. Among them the Argonauts tarried long, until Heracles at last persuaded them to set sail again. Just after they did so, the news came that Thoas was still living. Hypsipyle had to flee for her life from the anger of the other women.

The Argonauts sailed on, past Samothrace, and through the Hellespont, not halting again until they came to the island of Cyzicus. There the king received them hospitably. But when they had set sail again, after a brief stay, a mighty storm arose, and in the darkness of night they were driven on to the island again. The inhabitants failed to recognize them, and, taking them for pirates, fell upon them with swords and spears. A wild battle followed, and in the confusion the kindly king was slain by Jason. Sadly they embarked and rowed on without halting, until they reached the Mysian coasts. Here they landed to get water. Hylas, a fair youth who was the companion and especial favourite of Heracles, went further than the others. When he bent over the spring to fill his pitcher the nymphs below fell in love with his beauty, and drew him down to their own watery abode. Heracles sought him in vain, for although the unhappy youth tried to answer when Heracles called his name, the sound was drowned in the depths of the water, and 'Hylas—Hylas—Hylas' rang in vain through the air.

Again the Argo proceeded on her way until the need of water compelled a landing. This time they found themselves in the territories of the giant Amycus, who would allow no stranger to draw water until he had boxed with him. Many had lost their lives, for Amycus had never been beaten. This time, however, he had found his match. Polydeuces smiled when he heard the



HERMES, ORPHEUS, AND EURYDICE.
A Naples relief.

challenge, and went joyfully forth to meet Amycus. After a mighty combat the king was defeated; Polydeuces then bound him, helpless, to a tree, and left him there, heedless of his prayers for release, as Amycus had been of the prayers of many hundreds of strangers for water.

Now they were approaching the shores of the Black Sea. At Salmydessus, on the Thracian coast, dwelt Phineus, a blind and aged king, who was tortured by harpies that stole or defiled his food, whenever it was set before him. He had the gift of second-sight, and Jason had been warned that if any man could show him the way to Colchis, where the fleece hung, Phineus could. Phineus promised to set them on their way, if they would drive away the harpies which made his life a misery. They had been set upon him by the sun god as a punishment for the wrongs Phineus had done to his first wife, the daughter of Boreas, and her two children, whom he had cast into prison. Now, however, her brothers, Calais and Zetes, felt that Phineus had been punished long enough. Seeing how priceless was the help he could give the Argonauts, they spread their mighty wings and drove the evil birds away for ever. Then they freed their sister and set her sons upon their father's throne. The grateful Phineus then warned Jason of the dangers that lay before the ship, and how they might pass through them unscathed. First, he told them of the Symplegades, the two clashing rocks that stood at the entrance to the Black Sea, and which would crush Argo to pieces, as they had crushed so many vessels before her, drawing nearer and nearer together as she drew between them, and finally destroying her utterly. Jason listened to the counsel of Phineus, and when Argo was in sight of the great blue rocks,

bidding his men rest upon their oars in readiness to start at a moment's notice, he let fly a dove. The rocks closed upon it, and then slowly drew away again, to return to their ordinary position. The moment they began to retreat, Jason called to his men to strain every nerve, and rowing at the top speed of which they were capable, to get through the rocks before they could begin to close again. With a mighty effort they did it; they saw the fearsome cliffs draw nearer, nearer on either hand, but when they clashed together only the outmost portion of the stern was caught. At the first halt the helmsman died of disease, and Idmon the seer perished likewise, as he had foreseen. In the land of the Amazons they made no stay. Farther on, on the island of Aretias they found flocks of terrible birds, with wings, claws, and beaks of brass, and feathers that they shot out like arrows. These were the Stymphalian birds, who had flown thither after Heracles had frightened them away with his rattle. The Argonauts drove them off, and took on board the sons of Phrixus, whom they found shipwrecked on the island. Passing beneath the mighty Caucasian mountains, they heard from afar off the groans of Prometheus, and the flapping of the wings of the eagle that consumed his liver. They were now quite near to the river Phasis, which ran through the Colchian land, and soon they reached the end of their voyage. There Jason beached the good ship Argo, and in the morning repaired to the palace of king Aetes, to demand of him the golden fleece. At the court Jason saw the king's daughter, Medea, reputed to be a greater magician than her father. Medea was tall and dark, with crisping hair and great dark flashing eyes, like no woman Jason had ever seen; for these people of Colchis were barbarians, wholly alien to the

Greeks, who despised them for their wild and savage way of life. Medea, too, had never seen anything like Jason and his companions: fair-skinned men, with their keen faces and eyes deep with thought; and to her Jason seemed more wonderful than any man her eyes had beheld.

When her father, king Aeetes, heard Jason's request, he smiled darkly. The golden fleece was not to be had by the first asker. Jason must first capture and yoke together two brazen-hoofed bulls, from whose nostrils fire breathed forth, the gift of Hephaestus to the magician-king, and with them plough with a plough of brass the field of Ares. That done, he must sow the furrows with the teeth of the dragon which Cadmus had slain, when he founded Thebes. Phrixus had brought them with him, and Aeetes now showed them to Jason, telling him that armed men would spring up wherever they were sown—as had happened with Cadmus—and that they must be slain at once. If he could do all this, then, and not till then, the fleece should be his.

Now, indeed, Jason felt that his long quest was doomed to failure. His dear Argo had brought him thus far, but the fulfilment of his purpose seemed impossible. Impossible it would have been, had not Medea looked upon him with eyes of love. Knowing her love, his own went out to meet it, although she was a woman of another world from his, and of a race scorned by his countrymen, for her power and beauty were alike wonderful. When Jason fell on his knees at her feet and kissed her hands, Medea promised to lend him her aid in all things, although to do so meant plotting against Aeetes her father, and drawing down upon her head an anger that would be terrible indeed.

At sunset she withdrew to her own chamber, and

brewed in her magic vat a marvellous liquid, with which Jason anointed himself from head to foot, leaving no spot untouched. By this means he was rendered proof against fire and sword. He yoked the bulls, unscathed by the fire pouring from their nostrils, and with the superhuman strength given him by Medea's ointment, harnessed them to the brazen plough, and compelled them to plough up the field of Ares. Then from his helmet he took the dragon's teeth, and sowed them in the furrows. Almost before they could touch the ground they sprouted, and to Jason's horror and amazement, he saw, wherever a tooth had fallen, an armed man of vast proportions, rising out of the earth, clad in armour, and equipped with sword and spear. At first he tried to kill them as they rose, before their feet were disentangled from the soil. It was useless: there were too many of them; he was in the midst of an armed host, helpless. Then he remembered Medea's counsel. From the pouch that she had slung by his side he took a great stone and threw it among the earth-born giants. Ignorant of what it could be, they fell upon one another in the attempt to snatch it up, and in the struggle turned their swords against themselves.

When they were all dead Jason went to Aeetes and claimed his reward. Darkly the king smiled again, and said it was not in his power to give the fleece: but Jason might now approach the sleepless dragon that guarded the tree on which the fleece hung, and steal it—if he could.

He could not; there was no way by which a man could get past the dragon, and the dragon never slept day or night. Only Medea could help him. And Medea saw that if she helped him now she must leave her father and her home, and go forth with Jason: for in Colchis there would no more be home for her. Jason promised

he would take her home with him to Iolcus, and make her his bride: although it was written that no Greek could lawfully marry an alien woman. Medea believed him, and promised her aid in this too. He bade his comrades have Argo ready, and be seated at their oars in the harbour, so that they might start at once. Then he and Medea made their way to the garden, where the dragon lay, with the golden fleece shining on the tree above him. It was pure gold, and the brightness of it could be seen a long way off. Medea threw to the dragon a cake which she had made, sweetened deliciously with honey and spices, that hid the taste of the magic herbs she had put into it. The dragon ate it. Immediately his unblinking eyes began to close: he could not keep them open, but fell into a deep sleep. Then Jason stepped softly behind the tree and cut down the golden fleece. With it he and Medea, who brought with her her little brother Absyrtus—for she loved the boy—fled with all speed to the ship, for Medea knew well it could not be long ere the theft was discovered, and then her father would be exceeding wroth, and would send swift ships in pursuit. Indeed, the Argo had proceeded but a short distance, for all that the fifty oarsmen put forth their best strength, when the man on the look out espied Aetes coming in pursuit, and gaining on them, since his ship was bigger than the Argo, and manned by more rowers. Then did Jason begin to fear that all that he had won would be lost. Turning to Medea he begged her to devise some means by which they might delay the pursuers. Then, for Jason's sake, because she loved him, Medea devised a horrible plan. She bade the men slay poor little Absyrtus, and sever his body into many pieces. Then they cast the limbs into the sea behind them. Aetes saw the dreadful fragments,

and delayed to pick them up, in order that he might sadly bury them. While he did this the Argonauts, rowing with all their might, drew ahead steadily, and at length completely distanced their pursuers.

Many were the difficulties and adventures through which they passed on the way home, and several different stories are given of the journey by various writers, some of whom plainly mix up the voyage of the Argonauts with that of Odysseus. Most agree that they did not return by the way they had come, but instead sailed, under Medea's guidance, up the river Phasis, that flows into the great stream of Oceanus itself. When they had crossed it they dragged Argo overland for twelve days and nights, until they came to Lake Tritonis, and thence made their way into the Mediterranean.

At last they reached Iolcus once more. There Jason found that, while he had been absent, Pelias had slain his father Aeson, and driven his mother to kill herself in despair. In spite of these horrible deeds, Pelias had so strengthened his own power that no one in all the land durst raise a hand or say a word against him. When Jason came before him now, bringing the far famed golden fleece, and called upon Pelias to give him the sovereignty, as he had sworn, the old king smiled scornfully, and bade him make some more reasonable request. Let him, he said, be contented with the position of royal prince, with his rooms in the palace. To Medea, for all her beauty, he paid no heed. She was a barbarian, and in Greek eyes, no wife for Jason.

With but fifty men Jason could do nothing. But Medea's proud heart swelled with rage for herself and for him, and she devised a plan by which she thought to help him. Pelias was growing very old. Medea put

into the mind of his daughters that her magic arts could restore him to youth. Before their eyes she cut up an aged ram, and set it to seethe in a cauldron of boiling water, into which she had dropped some of her magic drugs. When the water boiled she uttered a spell, and there came forth from the cauldron a young lamb. In the same way, she told them, Pelias might be transformed into a youth. The women believed her, and did to their father as Medea had done to the ram. But when the cauldron was boiling and they called on Medea to pronounce the spell, she was nowhere to be found. Then the unhappy women realized that they had slain their father. They rushed to their brother, Acastus, and told him what had happened. Acastus and the people of Iolcus rose up and drove Medea and Jason forth from the land on pain of instant death. Then Acastus arranged that splendid games should be held in honour of the dead king, Pelias.

They found a refuge with Creon, king of Corinth. But Creon looked askance on Medea, and the heart of Jason too was turned against her. The love that he had once had for her in the days when she had helped him, was dead, and he now felt that she stood in his way. The Corinthians regarded her with disfavour, and dreaded her dark magic as an evil thing, just as the people of Iolcus had done. Jason therefore resolved to wed Glauce, the young daughter of King Creon, regardless of Medea, and the two sons she had borne him. Creon was favourable but, fearing the dangerous fury of Medea, he issued a decree banishing her and her sons from Corinth.

Medea's heart was full of bitterness when she knew what Jason had planned. In vain she reminded him of all that she had done for him and all the sacrifices she

had made; how she had given up for his sake home, country, father and kindred; in vain she appealed to him not to abandon her for another woman's sake, after they had passed through pain and danger together and lived for ten years side by side. Jason was unmoved. His plans were settled. It was too late. Then Medea, most deeply wounded as a woman and a princess, swore that she would not suffer unavenged. Not for nothing did she possess those magic arts which had so often helped Jason; he should learn that he could not thus slight and abandon her. But at the moment she dissembled her hate. She sent her two little boys to Glauce with gifts—a robe, marvellously woven of gold tissue, embroidered with flowers and adorned with priceless gems, such as the sun god himself might have worn, and a crown of rare workmanship, likewise set with flashing jewels. When the young queen saw the gifts she wished not to delay a moment in putting them on. At once she sped to her own chamber, sat down before her polished mirror of steel, set the crown upon her head, and clothed herself in the shining robe. Then clad in all their magnificence, she began to pace up and down the chambers of the palace, the long robes sweeping behind her over the marble floors. But gradually an awful change came over her; the fiery poison in which the robe was steeped began to work: from head to foot sharp, stinging tongues of pain pierced her tender flesh; the crown round her brows burned into them like red hot iron. Yet all the efforts of the queen and of the attendants, who flocked in answer to her frantic cries, could not pluck the robe from her or free her head from the circlet, which seemed to have grown into her very flesh. In vain she screamed with intolerable anguish. Creon heard her heart-rending

shrieks, and came rushing in: his daughter lay dead upon the ground. When he caught her in his arms and tried to warm her back to life, he too fell a victim. The poison passed from her to him, and father and daughter lay in death together. So Jason found them. He needed no explanation to tell him who had done the deed. With a wild shout of angry pain he rushed out, to wreak vengeance on Medea. But he was too late. When he reached her dwelling the two little boys lay cold and dead, slain by their mother's hand: thus had she planned to wound Jason to the heart, and at the same time to prevent all risk of his anger venting itself upon their sons. As the prince stood overwhelmed by the disasters that had come upon him, he was roused by a shouting from the people round. In the sky above his head there floated a winged chariot of glistening green and gold, shining with the radiance of the sun himself. Jason recognized the chariot which Helios, the sun god, had given to Medea. In it stood Medea herself, smiling darkly as she flew away towards Athens.

Jason remained in Corinth, and the story goes that he met his death through the ship Argo, which Medea had once taunted him with loving better than any living creature. He had had the old ship set up in a place of honour near Corinth, and one day as he lay sleeping near it, the stern of the vessel fell off and killed him.

CHAPTER VII

MELEAGER

WHEN Jason returned to Iolcus with the golden fleece, the rest of the Argonauts scattered to their several homes. Meleager returned to his father's halls in Calydon, bringing with him as his bride Cleopatra, the daughter of Idas, one of his companions on the voyage. The mother of Cleopatra was Marpessa, a maid so beautiful that Apollo loved her, and sought to carry her away from the house of her father, the river god, and make her his bride. But Idas, the strongest of living men, also loved Marpessa, and her heart inclined to him; he bore her away in his mighty arms. When Apollo pursued them, Idas drew his bow upon him, though a god, and called upon Zeus to help him. Zeus decreed that Marpessa should freely choose whether she would go with Apollo or with Idas. Marpessa feared that Apollo, being an immortal, for ever young and fair, would cease to care for her as she grew older, as in time she must, and lost her beauty, and would leave her for another maiden's sake. So she chose Idas, that they two might grow old together, and share all the chances and changes of human life. For this scorning of his love, Apollo hated Marpessa, and spoke a curse upon her. She died young, and she and her lovely daughter Cleopatra, and all her children after her, brought sorrow and misfortune on those that loved them.

When Meleager returned to Calydon with his bride, he

found war raging in Aetolia, and savage northern tribes laying waste the fair plains of his native land. Oeneus, his father, ruled over a rich domain, where all the fruits of the earth grew abundantly. The god Dionysus had given him the vine, and Oeneus had planted it all over the slopes of Calydon. But now the crops were being trampled down and the peaceful farms and villages laid in ruins by wild barbarian hordes. The king's armies had been repulsed, and he himself told his son sadly that the invaders were sent by an angry goddess to destroy him. When sacrificing to the gods he had forgotten one—Artemis. Then Meleager bade his father be of good cheer. He told him of all the perils and difficulties he had passed through, with his companions, on the expedition in search of the golden fleece, dangers much greater than this. Oeneus thereupon gave him command over the Calydonian armies. Meleager set forth, and by his skill and courage the invading Curetes, for so the invading northern tribes were called, were driven back. They were defeated in battle and their army destroyed. Thus for a time the war was at an end, and peace ruled in the land of Calydon. Then Oeneus and his queen Althaea, although she had belonged by birth to the people of the north, rejoiced in the prowess of their son and the way in which he had saved the land from the destruction that had seemed to stand so near.

Artemis, however, was wroth when she saw how the army she had sent into Calydon was destroyed. Soon news came to the court that a creature of heaven, a fierce white-tusked wild boar was raging through the country, rooting up the blossoming fruit trees, laying waste the farms and homesteads, carrying off children and animals, and even men and women, and devouring them. The boar was so huge and fierce that any man

who ventured to approach it perished, torn by its fearsome tusks. Arrows were of no avail to pierce its bristling hide, and parties of courageous villagers who had attacked the monster with stones, staves, and ploughshares, had been killed to a man. For miles around people fled in terror before it, and where it had been, the land, so rich that it was like a garden, became a desert, without a blade of corn. The vineyards were ruined, and the fruit trees torn down. The boar was doing more havoc than all the invading armies from the north and west had done.

Now, Meleager knew that since the boar was sent by Artemis, no ordinary force could cope with it. He proclaimed a mighty chase, therefore, and summoned all the most renowned heroes of the time to take part in it. They assembled at the court of Calydon, where Oeneus entertained them royally. Jason came, Idas, and Lynceus, Castor and Polydeuces (nephews to Queen Althaea, since Leda, wife of Tyndareus, was her sister), Theseus and his devoted companion Pirithous, Peleus, Telamon, Nestor, Admetus, and many more. Among them was one woman, Atalanta. Zeus was her father, but Zeus desired that all his children should be male: Helen, the daughter of Leda, was the only one of his daughters whom he ever acknowledged. Thus, when Clymene bore him a girl baby, Zeus ordered it to be taken from her and left in some desolate spot to perish. A she-bear found the infant, lying naked on the mountain-side, and suckled it with her own cubs, till a party of hunters carried the child off and brought her up as a huntress. From her earliest years Atalanta learned to use the bow and spear, to ride and run, swim and leap; when she grew up she was tall and graceful, beautiful with the beauty of perfect health and strength.

Many suitors sought her hand, but she had no wish for marriage, and declared that she would not wed until she met a man who could beat her in the race. Since she was matchless in speed of foot, no one succeeded in outrunning her until Hippomenes hit upon a cunning device. He persuaded Aphrodite, who always favoured ardent lovers, to give him three golden apples. As he ran, he dropped them, so that they fell a little to the side of the course, and, while Atalanta stooped to pick them up, he ran on, and reached the goal before her. But this was long after the Calydonian boar hunt.

When Meleager saw this glorious maiden he admired her beyond words. Cleopatra, his wife, was sickly, and loved best to keep her room; she was ever busied with her spinning and weaving within the house. Though Meleager loved her still, he could find no such joy in her companionship as that which Atalanta, who loved the chase and all noble sports as he did, could give him. Althaea marked her son's admiration for the huntress with great displeasure. She liked not such women, who left what seemed to her their proper place and meddled with the things that concerned men. Althaea's brothers, the sons of Thestius, shared her feelings. They were full of anger when they saw Atalanta take her place among the heroes assembling for the chase; they looked askance at her, and muttered angry words to one another.

The first two days of the hunt were unsuccessful: although the boar was tracked to his lair, the hunters could not get at him, and several lost their lives in the attempt. On the third day the beast rushed forth and charged the hunters. Atalanta's spear, sped with deadly aim, was the first to strike him. Then, as the boar stood tossing his head from side to side, maddened with pain,

with the sight of his fiercely glaring eyes obscured for the moment by the blood that gushed from the wound, Meleager rushed at him with heroic courage and dealt him a mortal blow. A shout of joy went up. The great deed was done. The others closed round, and the boar was soon overpowered. After a brief struggle his vast body lay stretched lifeless on the ground. His hide was stripped off and given to Meleager amid general acclamation. But Meleager turned at once to Atalanta. It was to her, who had struck the first blow, he said, that that honour rightly belonged. To her he gave the skin.

The huntsmen dispersed, and the heroes returned by different ways to the palace, to celebrate the victory. The indignation that Althaea's two brothers had felt at the presence of a woman at the hunt had grown hourly. Now, when they found that she was carrying off the prize of victory, the much coveted hide of the boar, it knew no bounds. As the maiden made her way back to the palace, bearing her spoil, they laid an ambush for her. Suddenly springing out upon her from behind a great tree, they attacked her, as she was passing through a glade of the forest. For all her courage and skill, Atalanta was no match for two powerful men. Moreover, she was encumbered by the heavy skin. After a struggle she was thrown down, and the brethren prepared to go off with their spoil. Then, in despair, she called out 'Meleager—Meleager'. Meleager, though some distance off, heard that cry. At the sound of the voice, which he knew at once for Atalanta's, he rushed to the spot, drawn sword in hand, and fell upon his uncles, as they were making off with the spoil. Burning with indignation and reckless as to who they were, he attacked them furiously, and slew them both.

Althaea, his mother, was sitting in her chamber in the palace: with her was Cleopatra, Meleager's wife. Greatly did they rejoice in the death of the terrible boar, and the undying fame that the prince had won for himself by his exploits. In days to come, they said, he would rank as a worthy peer to Jason and Heracles, since, though so young, he had already done so much. Althaea had but one grief, that Meleager should have given the prize to Atalanta. Then as they sat there, a sound of wailing and lamentation was heard without. Althaea sprang to her feet; looking forth from the casement she saw a piteous sight—the dead bodies of her two brothers being carried into the palace. At this Althaea gave a terrible cry, and calling for an attendant she demanded to know how all had happened.

When she heard that her two brothers had met their death at the hands of her son, and that Meleager had slain them on account of Atalanta, Althaea threw herself upon her knees and prayed. With her hands she beat upon the earth, as she called upon the dread powers of the underworld, Hades and Persephone and the Erinyes, that walk in darkness, to hear her and avenge her brothers' blood. As her tears flowed down she cried to the Pitiless Ones to bring her son to death. Even as she prayed, indeed, the foemen were assembling in the north, gathering their men together to attack Calydon. This Althaea knew not.

Suddenly she rose to her feet, while Cleopatra watched her, silent terror at her heart. The tears still glistened on her aged cheek, but her eyes were dry. Opening a chest that stood by the wall, she took from it a large box of finely carved sandalwood, set with ivory, a box that Cleopatra had never seen before, in all the years during which she had lived in the palace. Out of this

box Althaea took a strange object—a log of wood, partly blackened and charred by the fire, so that fine, grey ash fell from it, as she lifted it up. With a strange and terrible smile Althaea took the log in her hand, and going up to the fire that burned on the hearth, threw it among the flames. Then she turned to Cleopatra. ‘That,’ she said, ‘is the life of my son. As it wastes so will he waste; when it is consumed away, so will his life be consumed.’ She stood looking into the fire, where the log was kindling. Then Cleopatra remembered the story she had heard of the birth of Meleager, and she trembled.

When Meleager was but seven days old, his mother lay one evening on her bed, her chamber lit only by the flickering light of the log fire. As she lay thus, she was suddenly aware of the presence in the room of three strange figures. Women they were, their pale faces shadowed by heavy, dark hair, and their tall forms wrappèd in mist-like robes of grey and black. One held a distaff, another a scroll, and the third a pair of shears. Then Althaea knew that she saw before her the three Fates, the weird sisters who held in their hands the threads of life and death, the lots of good and evil. And as she gazed at them, hardly believing the witness of her eyes, a voice spoke—which of the sisters uttered it she could not tell—saying, ‘Great is thy joy, Althaea, in the birth of thy son. But prepare for sorrow, for it is written that he shall live no longer than the brand which now lies smouldering on thy hearth. By its brief life is the span of his life measured.’ With these solemn words the apparitions vanished. Instantly, Althaea sprang from her couch, and, without hesitating a moment, seized the brand from the heart of the flaming fire. In the centre it was already glowing red, but at the

end as yet untouched. Smoking and sending forth fiery sparks as it was, she carried it swiftly across the room to where there stood a fair basin of beaten silver, filled with fresh water. Into this Althaea plunged the hissing log, and poured over it more water from the ewer, until the flame was altogether extinguished. Then she hid the charred wood within a costly casket, and kept it hidden away, so that none might touch or see it, as her most precious treasure.

Dry and hardened as it was after all these years, the brand did not at once kindle into flame. While the two women stood looking at it in the gathering darkness, Cleopatra helpless to prevent the fierce old woman, there came a great noise of voices without in the courtyards; a hurrying of feet to and fro, and a confused shouting. Steps were heard within the palace, and a great crying, 'Where is Meleager? where is Meleager?' The cries came nearer and nearer. There was a knocking at the door, and when it opened men-at-arms stood without.

'Tell us, O queen, where we may find Meleager. The Curetes are upon us; a great host, greater and more dangerous than that which came before, is descending from the north. Already their men fill the valleys, and without Meleager we are helpless and strengthless against them.'

Althaea looked at the men with wide-open eyes. Before she could answer anything, however, there was a great shout. 'Meleager! Meleager! here is Meleager.' The crowd that now filled the corridors parted, and Meleager came through. As she saw him, Cleopatra gave a loud cry; his face was deathly pale, his eyes burned with the light of fever, and his lips twitched. She threw her arms round his neck and held him fast.

Then the captains spoke to the prince, and told him the news of the approach of the enemy.

'Why should I go forth?' then said Meleager. 'Has not my mother cursed me? Is not the span of my life as short even as the life of that log now burning on the hearth? Why should I spend my last hours in bitter warfare for the sake of those who have betrayed me, and not rather in the arms of my sweet wife? With her will I stay, until life ebbs altogether from me. Already I feel it failing fast.' His voice broke.

Althaea said no word. Only she stood by the hearth, guarding the log lest any should strive to pluck it forth, for her heart was bitter against her son. No one now, indeed, could have availed to save it, for the fire was very slowly but surely eating it away. Then old Oeneus came up to his son and begged him, for his sake, to save the land of Calydon. The holy priests came up from the temple and entreated him; and his sisters came and wound their white arms about his knees, imploring him to save the land. But Meleager said nothing. His burning eyes did not stray from his wife's face. Towards Althaea he had not once turned his eyes.

Then Cleopatra stayed her weeping, and still clinging to his neck she bade him go forth and spend the last hours of his life gloriously, fighting for his land. She spoke of the woes that come on those whose city is taken, and the deathless glory that should be his if he saved Calydon from this direful doom. When he heard her, Meleager threw back his head and set his teeth. He kissed Cleopatra once, and then, drawing his sword, he waved it over his head, and turning to the soldiers gathered round, called to them to follow him. He had never led them save to victory; he would lead them to

victory now. Pale and dauntless, Cleopatra saw him go forth. She heard the great shout that hailed him, and watched the army marching out in battle array, the prince on his white charger at its head.

On the hearth the log was burning brightly. The flames had penetrated to its core, and nothing now could have prevented it from being consumed utterly away. Within a few hours it was burnt out. On the hearth there lay a handful of charred ashes. News came to the palace that the invaders had been utterly routed; their army was annihilated. There was no longer any danger from the men of the north. Meleager, fighting heroically, had perished, not by the hand of the enemy, but suddenly, mysteriously, as he sat upon his horse, he had fallen back, dead.

CHAPTER VIII

BELLEROPHON

WHEN Perseus¹ cut off the head of Medusa, the blood which gushed forth fell upon the ground, and thence rose up again, by the power of Poseidon, to whom the strange maiden had been dear, in the shape of two immortal creatures, the giant Chrysaor of the Golden Sword, and the winged horse, Pegasus. Pegasus at once soared up into the air on strong radiant pinions, and did not rest until, flying over land and sea, he came to the Acropolis of Corinth.

When the youths of Corinth descried the matchless steed, they were all fired by desire to capture and tame him, but none knew how to do it, for the winged horse soared up into the air above their heads, as soon as any one approached him. Most of them soon gave up the enterprise as hopeless. Only one still continued his attempts. This was Bellerophon, the king's son, a scion of the noble house of Aeolus, and fairest and noblest of all the youths of Corinth. His longing to possess the winged steed left him no rest day or night. All his family were famous breeders and tamers of horses, and greatly honoured by Poseidon on that account. Glaucus, the father of Bellerophon, was especially renowned for the swiftness of his steeds, which indeed led to his end in a terrible fashion, for when he went to Iolcus to attend the funeral games of Pelias there, he was thrown from his chariot and torn to pieces by his own mares.

At last, after many vain efforts, Bellerophon went to

¹ See chapter iv.

a wise seer and asked him how he might capture Pegasus. Polyidos, the seer, advised him to pass the night in prayer in the sanctuary of Athene and to entreat her help. He knew that the goddess, who had assisted Perseus, was also friendly to this young man, his kinsman, since she looked with kindly eye on all heroes whose minds were set, like his, on high adventure. Bellerophon did as Polyidos advised. Towards midnight, he fell asleep in the temple, and in a dream the goddess appeared before him. She gave him a golden bridle, and bade him, after doing sacrifice to Poseidon, go out and capture Pegasus with it. Awaking, Bellerophon followed her instructions, and found the winged steed drinking at the fountain of Peirene. The horse let him place the golden bridle in its mouth; holding it, Bellerophon leapt upon the creature's back. At first the horse tried to throw him off. Up, up he soared into the high chill air, rearing and caracoling at a dizzy height, but Bellerophon, undaunted, never loosed his grip of the bridle, nor could all Pegasus' rearing unseat him from his back. At last the steed recognized its master; it ceased to struggle, and soon the two became devoted companions. In Bellerophon, Pegasus had found a hero worthy to be his rider; he carried him far and wide over land and sea. Thus Bellerophon saw many strange lands and peoples and sights hidden from the eyes of common men, and his spirit thrilled as he swept through the air upon the winged horse, or was admitted, by its means, to take part in wondrous adventures. He stood on the slopes of Mount Helicon when the daughters of Pierus, famed throughout Greece for their singing, boastfully challenged the Muses to a contest with them. First the maidens sang, but as they did so darkness closed around them, as if to hide

their vain arrogance. When they ceased they were transformed into birds, as a punishment for their conceit. Then the Muses began, and at the sound of their heavenly voices the light returned, while the heavens and the sea and all the woods and rivers stood silent to listen in delight. The hill of Helicon itself began to rise heavenward, transported by the joyous strains, and would have moved for ever from its place had not Bellerophon commanded Pegasus to stop it with a kick of his hoof. Where he struck the mountain-side a marvellous fountain gushed forth, ever afterwards known as the fount of Hippocrene. To it poets and artists came, to drink of the wonderful waters, which gave inspiration to all who tasted them.

Not long after this it happened that Bellerophon slew a certain Corinthian nobleman, with whom he had had a quarrel, and for this crime was banished from his home. First he went to the land of Troezen. There Aithra, the daughter of King Aegeus, fell in love with the youth, to whom the gods had, indeed, granted beauty and lovely manhood. Her father consented to the wedding, but when all the preparations had been made messengers came from Corinth, who told the king of the crime for which Bellerophon had been banished from his native land, and he had to flee from Troezen.

Sadly then he made his way to Tiryns, where Proetus, the king, received him kindly, and made rich sacrifices to the gods, in order that he might be purified of his sin. Proetus liked the young man, and bade him dwell in Tiryns as long as he would. Fair chambers were given him at the palace, and at the royal banquets he was placed, as the most honoured guest, next to the queen, Stheneboea. From this honour, however, came new sorrow to Bellerophon. For as Stheneboea saw him daily

and conversed with him, her heart was filled with pity for his sadness and with love for his fair face. Bellerophon loved her not, and shame and indignation seized him when she, the wife of his generous host, one day told him that she was fain to flee with him and leave Proetus. When she entreated him to kiss her, he refused. She was the wife of another, and fair though she was, he loved her not at all. Her passionate entreaties filled him with disgust, and he spoke bitter words to her.

Then the heart of Stheneboea was filled with cruel rage, and in her suffering she resolved that Bellerophon should suffer too. She went to her husband and told him that his guest had basely wronged him in his own halls, coming to her, his wife, and asking her to flee with him. At first Proetus wished to slay Bellerophon outright, but he feared to do this, for many in Tiryns loved the youth, and believed that the gods must love him since he owned Pegasus, the winged steed. Moreover, Bellerophon was still a guest under his roof. Proetus therefore sent him, as if on an embassy, to Lycia with a message graven in cypher on a tablet, which he was to convey to Stheneboea's father, Iobates, the king there. Bellerophon set off gladly, for it irked him to dwell in the same halls as Stheneboea. Pegasus bore him safely to Lycia. When Iobates read the message Proetus had sent him he looked long at the young man, without saying anything of that which the tablet bore. Then he bade Bellerophon go forth and destroy a terrible man-eating monster, that was laying waste the land, and had slain all who had gone against it. This was the Chimaera, a beast of strange and awful appearance, with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the long coils of a serpent for a tail. From its jaws it breathed forth living flame. Mounted on Pegasus,

Bellerophon flew over its head and plunged a long lance of exceeding strength and sharpness right into the fire-breathing mouth of the monster. Then, as it lay mortally wounded, he came down to earth, and advancing upon it sword in hand, slew it with many fearful wounds.

After this he came back to King Iobates, who set him many other direful tasks. He sent him against the Amazons and the Solymi, but Bellerophon returned victorious from both expeditions. Then the king set a body of picked Lycian soldiers to lie in ambush for him, as he returned one day. Bellerophon, however, defended himself so well that those of the soldiers who had stood their ground lay dead in heaps around him, while the rest fled.

Then it seemed clear to Iobates, that the gods did not will the destruction of Bellerophon, which Proetus had bid him accomplish. He questioned the young man about his origin, and Bellerophon told him of his parents, of the vision in which Athene had appeared to him, and of the manner in which she had helped him to subdue Pegasus. Then Iobates showed him Proetus' letter. When Bellerophon read in it the cruel slander which Stheneboea had uttered against him, rage filled his heart. Since he had no love for Stheneboea, he could neither understand nor forgive her. Her love for him seemed to dishonour him in his own esteem; it offended his fierce purity of soul, while the base manner in which she had taken her revenge inspired in him an unjust contempt for all women. He had never known mother or sister; his life had been lonely, and spent in hard and dangerous toil. He judged others harshly, because he had no understanding of weaknesses he did not share.

After reading the letter he sat silent for some time. When night came and Iobates and all his household slept, he mounted upon Pegasus and flew back to Tiryns. When Proetus and Stheneboea heard of his return they were afraid, and plotted how they might slay him. Several days passed, however, and he did not come to the palace. Then one afternoon, as Stheneboea was walking alone in her garden, she saw over her head what looked like a golden cloud. It grew larger and more brilliant as it came nearer, and soon she saw that it was no cloud, but a white steed, whose wings of gold and green shone dazzling in the sunlight. On it sat Bellerophon, his fair hair shining like a cap of gold, and the stern pale face she saw nightly in her dreams more beautiful even than of old. The horse descended to the earth, and Bellerophon, vaulting from the saddle, came towards her, leading it by the bridle, and holding out his hand. He did not smile or say anything, but motioned to her to climb into the saddle. Then the heart of Stheneboea was filled with joy—she thought he had come back to take her with him, as she had once begged him to do.

When she was mounted he stood beside her; she waited for him to get up behind. Instead he spoke to Pegasus words that she did not understand, and to her amazement, an amazement which grew into horror, she found herself rising rapidly into the air. Bellerophon had said nothing, but his silence was more terrible than any words, for now she realized that this was his revenge. As she rose she saw him standing still, with the same inscrutable expression on his face; soon he was but a speck in the distance; the towers of the palace, the green trees of the garden, disappeared as Pegasus rose. Then a chill air smote her, and she clung trembling to

the horse's neck, for they had passed away from the land, and now below she saw the green, glistening sea. As they came over it the horse began to sink. She heard the roaring of the waves, and a cry of agony burst from her lips. As if at a signal, Pegasus reared his neck, gathered his legs together, and threw her from his back. The waves parted for an instant, the foam rose a little higher ; Stheneboea was no more.

Bellerophon returned to Lycia colder and graver than ever. He said no word in explanation of his absence, and Iobates did not venture to question him. But he now honoured the hero greatly, giving him his daughter in marriage, and the half of his rich and fertile kingdom to rule over as his domain. The fame of Bellerophon—the man who had captured Pegasus and slain the Chimaera—travelled far and wide ; in Corinth especially he was honoured as a hero ; but there was no peace in his own heart. His wife loved him well, and bore him three fair children ; nevertheless he had not found happiness. Although so beloved of others, his own heart had never known love. At night, as he lay sleepless, the face of Stheneboea floated before him ; he saw her as she had looked on the unhappy day when she told him of her guilty love, or as she had gazed upon him from the back of Pegasus. Dead, she haunted him. He wandered alone over the plain, devouring his own soul, and avoiding the paths of men, and a great desire came upon him to rise into the regions of the sky, where he might escape from this soiled world and mingle freely among the winds and stars that dwelt there. So one day he mounted upon Pegasus, and bade him soar up and up, ever higher, until the earth disappeared entirely from the view, and then still on, until they reached the gates of heaven.

But when Zeus saw this he was wroth, and sent a gadfly to sting Pegasus. Maddened by the pain, the winged horse reared so violently that Bellerophon was thrown. Falling from a terrific height, beyond imagination, he was slain before he reached the earth.

Pegasus flew upward to Olympus. There he was given a stall in the palace of Zeus, and bore his thunder and lightning on his back.

CHAPTER IX

THE TROJAN WAR. I

NONE of the fair young goddesses in the courts of heaven was more beautiful than Thetis, the first of the lovely daughters of the old sea-god Nereus. Hera loved her, and brought her away from where her sisters lived, in the palaces in the depths of the sea, to dwell under her protection; and many of the gods turned their eyes upon Thetis, who seemed to grow in loveliness every day. Tall she was and fair, with arms of a dazzling rounded whiteness, and exquisite little feet. Poseidon, the mighty ruler of the deep, looked upon her beauty, and longed that she might be his; Zeus himself sought her love. But, alas! for Thetis, it had been foretold at her birth that she should bear a son greater than his father in might and strength. Therefore Zeus decreed that she might not wed in heaven, but must take as her husband a mortal man. For this high honour he chose Peleus, lord of Iolcus, the son of Aeacus, and brother of Telamon. His mother was a daughter of Chiron, the wise centaur. At first Thetis was most unwilling to wed a mortal, and, when Peleus tried to clasp her in his arms, she used the power she possessed, as a sea-goddess, to change herself first into fire, then into water, then into a beast, then into a fish. But Peleus caught her in a cave, to which he closed up all the entrances, and would not let her go. At last she saw that resistance to the will of Zeus was useless: at the same time Peleus' eager love and keen determina-

tion moved her admiration, while his manly beauty touched her heart. She gave way, and the marriage was celebrated with great pomp in Chiron's cave on Mount Pelion. All the gods and goddesses came to the wedding, bringing rare and splendid gifts, among them a magnificent set of armour and weapons forged for Peleus by the matchless skill of Hephaestus. Chiron gave a lance made from an ash that had grown on Mount Pelion, and Poseidon a pair of immortal steeds, Balius and Xanthus by name, swift and beautiful as the horses of the Sun. As they sat at the feast, Apollo and the Muses sang of the exploits and sufferings of the hero Peleus, and foretold that a son should be born to him and his goddess wife who should be the greatest hero Greece had ever seen, and the fame of his deeds should be remembered down the ages.

Since the gods wished to bring nothing but good to the house of Peleus, Eris, the baneful goddess of strife, had not been bidden to the feast, for, wherever she appeared, discord was sure to follow. Suddenly, when the mirth was at its height, she entered, unperceived by most of the guests, and casting on to the banqueting table an apple of pure gold, disappeared again as suddenly as she had come. On the apple was written these words—'For the Fairest.'

Immediately the concord and happiness of the assemblage was at an end. Eris had done her work. No sooner did the goddesses see the golden apple than they began to contend among themselves. Aphrodite at once declared that the apple must belong to her: the goddess of beauty must be the fairest. Athene disputed this; beauty, she said, was not merely a question of face and form: the fairest was she who was most beautiful in soul as well as body, and therefore the apple belonged

to her as the goddess of wisdom and the arts. Hera thereupon rose indignant. No one had a right to the apple save the queen of heaven ; the wife of Zeus must be the fairest.

There seemed no way out of the difficulty. At last Zeus called for silence, and said that the question could not be decided by the goddesses themselves, nor must the joy of the marriage feast of Peleus and Thetis be clouded by unseemly wrangling. An impartial judge must decide who was the fairest. On the hills of Ida there dwelt a lonely shepherd, Paris by name, who tended his flocks among the fair streams that watered the wooded mountain slopes. Paris, Zeus decreed, should judge who was the fairest. Iris, the messenger of the gods, was sent to bear him the golden apple and to prepare him for the coming of the goddesses.

Since his earliest youth Paris had dwelt on Ida, and knew no other home, but, although he knew it not, he was a prince of the royal house of Troy and a son of Priam, the rich king, whose fair lands lay all round the foot of Ida. Priam had inherited the kingdom because his elder brother Tithonus had been carried off by Eos, the nymph of the dawn. She fell in love with his beauty, and prevailed upon Zeus to promise that he should live for ever. She forgot, however, to ask that she should be for ever young. Tithonus waxed older and older, until, when he was withered and dried up by extreme age, Eos shut him up in horror in a solitary chamber, so that she might not look upon him. Priam, a mighty warrior, remained in Trôÿ, and ruled there on the death of his father Laomedon. He was famous throughout the Greek world on both sides of the Hellespont, not only for his great wealth, but for the beauty and prowess of his numerous children. In all he had no less than

fifty sons and daughters. Now Hecuba, his second wife, dreamed, just before her second son was born, that she had given birth to a burning brand, which set all Troy in flames. When she recounted her dream to Priam he called upon the priests, and they told him that when the child was born it must perish, for otherwise terrible disasters would come upon the land. The infant, who was named Alexandros, was therefore taken up to the high rocks of Mount Ida, and there left to die of cold and hunger. Priam and Hecuba wept for him as dead. Years passed. Other fair sons and daughters were born to the king and queen, but there was still grief in their hearts for the babe that was lost, and even after more than twenty years had gone by Priam ordered funeral games to be celebrated in his honour. As prize at these games, he set the finest bull to be found among all the herds grazing on the mountains.

All the sons of Priam were mighty athletes. Hector the eldest, had never been beaten. Great therefore was the surprise of every one, when a young shepherd from Mount Ida defeated them all in contest after contest, and finally won the bull. The angry sons of Priam indeed fell upon the youth, and were about to slay him, when their sister Cassandra, who was a prophetess, inspired by Apollo, rushed down into the arena with dishevelled hair. She parted the fighters, and throwing her arms round the neck of the stranger, declared that he was their long mourned brother Alexandros. Priam and Hecuba received their son with joy, and he recounted to them the story of his life. The shepherd who had brought him and called him by the name he bore, Paris, had told him that he had found him, as an infant, in the lair of a she-bear, in a part of the mountain to which few ever penetrated. The wild creature had

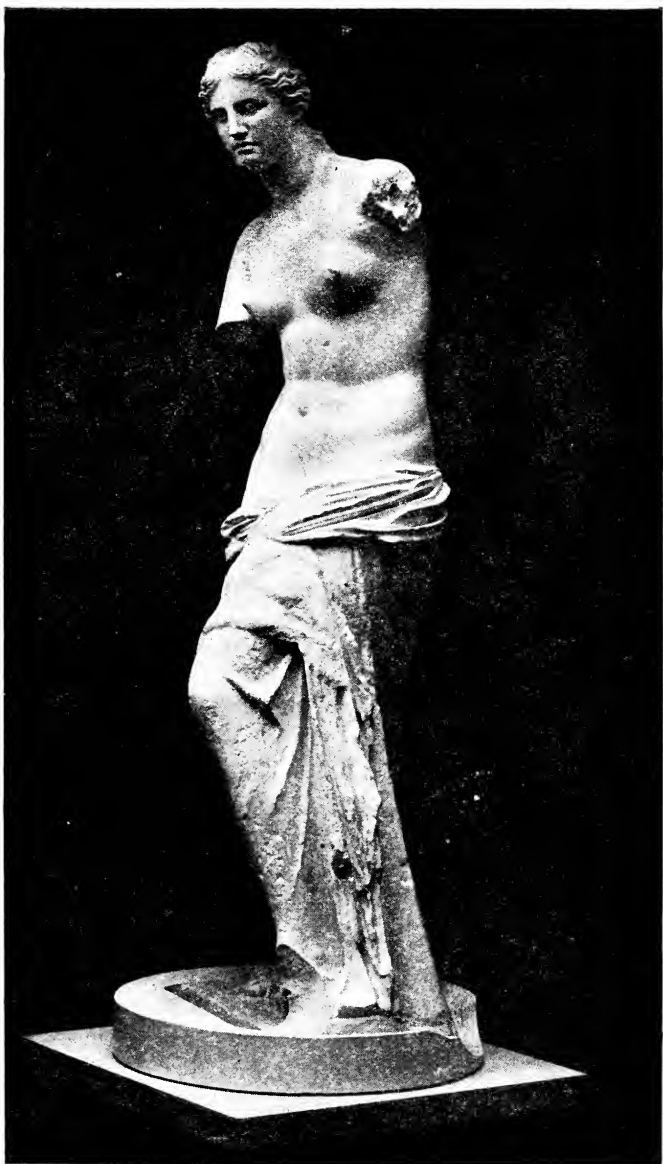
cherished the child tenderly with her own cubs for several days. On Mount Ida then, Paris grew up, fair and strong, tending his flocks. He had wooed and won Oenone, a gracious river nymph, and with her Iris had found him dwelling in perfect happiness, when she called him at the high behest of Zeus, to decide the strife of the three goddesses over the golden apple. At midnight, when all the woods lay stilled in drowsy heat, Hermes came to Paris, and brought him to where, in a deep glade on the mountain-side, the goddesses stood on the smooth sward, shaded by the tall pine trees. Paris came, clad in his rough shepherd's garb, the leopard skin over his shoulder, a youth so beautiful and full of grace that, even in that magnificent company, he seemed no wise abashed or ill at ease. Only when, at Hermes' bidding, he raised his eyes to the three glorious goddesses standing before him on the green sward, among the sweet-smelling flowers, he bowed his head for a moment, dazzled by the radiance divine. Then, holding out the golden apple in his hand, he raised his eyes once more and looked from one to the other. At that, she whom he knew to be Hera, because by her side there stood the white peacock, opened her lips and told him that she could give him great possessions, wealth, and the power that all men desired, if he gave the apple to her. Paris listened, turning the golden fruit over and over in his hand. When she had ended, Athene stepped forward, clad in dazzling armour, her owl upon her shield, and, turning her clear blue-grey eyes upon him, she offered him glory and renown, to be won by mighty deeds and wise courage, rather than the easy fame that came from great possessions; she would make him a hero glorious through the Greek world.

She ceased, and Paris became aware of a delicious

fragrance, sweeter than roses or violets. Aphrodite stood by his side, all her golden hair unbound and thrown back from her lovely face. She smiled upon him, and he felt her irresistible might. 'I', she murmured, 'offer you not power or fame, but the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, whom I will give you for your wife.' . . .

Thereupon Paris gave her the apple. For him, however, the choice brought no good fortune. Aphrodite's favours were often fatal gifts, and so it was with him; while the wrath of Hera and Athene brought bitter ruin on all his royal race. Oenone wept bitterly, but her tears moved him not. He was resolved to set forth in search of the most beautiful woman in the world, promised him by Aphrodite. Paying no heed to Oenone's desolate cry he left his mountains and went down to Troy. There he took part in the games, and so was recognized by Cassandra as the lost prince Alexandros.

In Troy, however, he tarried no long time. Soon he set sail from there, and, guided by Aphrodite, he reached the kingdom of Sparta, and came to the house of Menelaus. There, so soon as his eyes fell upon the wife of Menelaus, he knew that he had come to the end of his quest. For Helen was indeed the marvel of all Greece; so beautiful was she that no man could look upon her and not be moved. She was a being apart, unlike all other women. Helen had grown up in Sparta, in the house of Tyndareus the king, with her sister Clytemnaestra, and her twin brothers Castor and Polydeuces; but all men knew that Leda the queen had been visited by Zeus, who came to her in the guise of a swan, and that Zeus himself was the father of Helen and of Polydeuces, who, unlike his brother Castor, was immortal. Clytemnaestra was handsome and stately beyond most



VENUS OF MELOS

[*Photo by Spooner*]

women, but in Helen's charm and beauty there was something more than mortal. When she grew up, lovers came from all parts of Greece to sue for her hand. As many as thirty or more came. The old King Tyndareus was much perplexed, for he feared the wrath of those that were not chosen. Odysseus, who was among the suitors, advised him to make each wooer swear that he would stand loyally by the lucky man, whomsoever he might be, and then let Helen choose as she would. Tyndareus acted on this counsel, and Helen chose Menelaus. Menelaus, with his brother Agamemnon, had fled from their home in Mycenae after the horrible death of their father Atreus,¹ and taken refuge in Sparta. There they abode until Agamemnon, who had married Clytemnaestra, collected a power and reconquered Mycenae, where he ruled in great state, the richest and most powerful king in Greece, while his brother Menelaus ruled in Sparta with Helen, after the death of old King Tyndareus. So they dwelt happily, despite the curse that rested on the house of Atreus, until Paris came sailing over the sea.

With him came woe and shame and misery for all, to last through more than twenty weary years. But none knew it. Menelaus welcomed his guest right royally, and when, after some days had passed, he had to go away on matters of state, he bade his wife treat the son of Priam in all ways as a most honoured friend. In all this Aphrodite was at work. And now that the two were left alone together, the end was not far off.

When Menelaus returned he found his house deserted. Paris had sailed away in the ship in which he had come, and with him had gone the false Helen, taking her servants and her treasures. In vain he paced from room

¹ See chapter xi.

to room; nothing remained but the pictures of her, which were now hateful to him, like all the objects in the house, because they brought Helen vividly before him, as vividly as the dreams that visited him in the night. Soon his misery was sharpened to a fierce anger. He heard that Paris and Helen had sojourned some time on the island of Cranae, where they had married, and that now they were in Troy, within the palace of Priam, the father of his faithless guest.

Then Menelaus swore that he would get Helen back, willing or unwilling. At once therefore he got ready a swift ship, and set sail for Troy. With him he took Odysseus, renowned throughout Greece for his wisdom in counsel and his persuasive tongue. But their expedition was vain.

The Trojans mocked their just claims. Paris refused to give Helen up. In the night, the house where Menelaus and Odysseus lay was treacherously attacked, and they escaped to their vessel with difficulty. Then Menelaus swore an oath, and called the gods to witness, that he would not rest, night and day, until he had won back his wife and taken vengeance on Paris and all his house, for the wrong that had been done him. Since the Trojans refused to listen to the claims of justice they should be compelled to bend to force.

Agamemnon felt the wrongs of Menelaus as keenly as though they were his own; and the two brothers summoned all the chiefs of might and renowned heroes in Greece to take part in an expedition against Troy. Not one of them refused. First, they called upon Odysseus, king of Ithaca, and he came at once when Agamemnon and Menelaus called, leaving his young wife Penelope, the beautiful niece of Tyndareus, and his little son Telemachus, who was but an infant; he

came, although his heart was heavy within him, because of the oracle which had told him that twenty years would pass before he saw wife and child again: and he brought with him the men of Ithaca and the surrounding islands, in twelve well-benched ships. And the goddess Athene, who loved Odysseus dearly, was well pleased when she saw him set forth, for she knew that, though he must undergo grievous trouble and many years wandering over the sea, yet he should win immortal renown, and should do great harm to the Trojans, with whom she was wroth for Paris's fault. For there was no man in all the Grecian host so keen of wit as Odysseus. Brave he was in the field, and in the council chamber he surpassed all men save Nestor. Nestor, king of Pylos in Messenia, joined the expedition, in spite of his great age. With his son Antilochus, who had once sought the hand of Helen, he came, at the head of ninety ships. Agamemnon and all the host dearly loved the old man. In spite of his years and white hairs, his courage was that of a young man, and his wisdom, justice, and eloquence made all turn to him in every difficulty.

Then at the request of Agamemnon, Nestor and Odysseus went to the halls of Peleus in Iolcus to ask Peleus' son Achilles to take part in the expedition. This was the child of whose great deeds to come Apollo and the Muses had sung at the marriage feast of Peleus and the goddess Thetis. To Thetis it was a great grief to think that her dear son was mortal, and must in time grow old and die, while she lived on. So she tried every means in her power by which to safeguard him. By dipping him in the waters of the river Styx, she made him proof against human weapons. Only in the heel could he be wounded, for Thetis had held him by the heel in order to dip him in the water. By day she

anointed him with ambrosia, and at night she held him in the fire, in order that the mortal part of him might melt away. But one evening, as she was doing this, Peleus came in, and snatched his son away with a cry of horror. Thetis, seeing all her efforts vain, fled from Iolcus to her own home among the nymphs of the sea, and returned no more. Then Peleus took his boy to the cave, where Chiron lived, and the wise old centaur brought Achilles up, and trained him in all manly exercises and all the graces of life. He found, indeed, that the boy needed hardly any teaching. Fear was unknown to him. He was sure of eye and marvellously swift of foot. At six years old he slew wild-boars and lions, and caught stags without either dog or net. Achilles grew up, in uncommon beauty of face and form, and with a character that none could fail to admire. He had a high and delicate sense of honour and truth; if he was keenly aware of what was just and due to himself, he was equally clear as to the rights of others. His temper was hasty, but generous to a fault, even to an enemy. His failings were those of a great nature, not of a small one.

Nestor and Odysseus had only to tell Achilles of what was being planned; he was eager to start at once. With him came Patroclus, son of Menoetius, his inseparable companion and brother-in-arms. The two young men loved each other dearly; their friendship had never been broken by any quarrel or jealousy.

A mighty host was now assembling, and all the most famous leaders and kings in Greece gathered with men and ships. From Argos came Tydeus' son Diomedes, dear to Athene, accompanied by his trusty comrades Sthenelus and Euryalus, and bringing with him eighty ships. From Salamis came Ajax, son of Telamon, and

cousin to Achilles, bringing twelve ships, and from Locris, Ajax, son of Oileus, bringing forty. Ajax, son of Telamon, was a man of mighty strength and stature, towering head and shoulders above all the rest, even above Achilles; thus he was always known as Ajax the greater, while the Locrian Ajax, specially distinguished for his swiftness of foot, was known as Ajax the lesser. From Crete came Idomeneus, son of Deucalion, who had been one of Helen's suitors. He brought eighty ships. Among other renowned heroes was Philoctetes, king of the Malians in Oeta, who had inherited from his father Poeas the bow and arrows of Heracles.

In the harbour of Aulis the vast host mustered, seven hundred and eighty-six ships and a hundred thousand men strong. Some of the ships were painted black, others red, all were well manned with strong and skilful rowers, and stored with munition of war. Over all Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, was chosen leader; he brought the largest contingent of ships, for he had one hundred under his own command, as well as sixty which he lent to the Arcadians.

Before the start was made, sacrifice was offered to the gods. The altar had been set near a spring, under a spreading plane tree. There, round about the spring, the Greeks were offering fair hecatombs to the gods, when suddenly a portent was seen. A terrible snake, blood-red on the back, sprang out from beneath the altar, and darted up the plane tree. There, upon the highest branch, a brood of eight young sparrows was nestling beneath the leaves. With the speed of lightning, the serpent had seized the nest, swallowed the nestlings, and caught the mother bird, on the wing, as she circled above him screeching. Then, while all who looked on stood and marvelled, they saw the snake itself turned

to stone. Calchas, the seer of the host, bade them be of good cheer, for the omen signified that the war would last nine years—one for each of the birds—but in the tenth the long-haired Achaeans would take the wide-wayed city of Troy. Already the Delphic priestess had promised Agamemnon success, telling him that Troy would fall when the best of the Greeks quarrelled.

So they set forth. At Lemnos, where they put in for water, Philoctetes was bitten by a poisonous snake, and the stench from his wound was so horrible that Odysseus advised that he should be left on the island. Despite Philoctetes' entreaties, this was done; he was left behind. The fleet proceeded on its way, but soon afterwards a fearful storm arose, and they were driven back to Aulis. There a deadly calm fell. Day after day no wind blew to swell their sails, and for all their impatience they could not go on. When Calchas was consulted, he declared that the goddess Artemis was wroth with Agamemnon. In the year of the birth of his daughter Iphigenia he had promised to sacrifice to the goddess the fairest thing the year brought forth. When the lovely child was born, however, he had failed to keep his vow. Again, he had drawn down her anger by killing a hind that was sacred to her. Now Artemis could only be appeased by the sacrifice promised her before; Iphigenia must die.

At first Agamemnon refused the unnatural sacrifice demanded of him. But as the days passed on and the men clamoured, Menelaus came to him and begged him to put the good of the great host assembled there, and the purpose for which they were gathered, before his own feelings. Agamemnon at last gave way. He sent to Clytemnestra a message bidding her send their daughter to be betrothed to Achilles. In due course

Iphigenia arrived, and the terrible deed was accomplished.

A favouring breeze sprang up, and the fleet setting sail again at last, reached the Troad without mishap. An oracle had said that the first man to land would be the first to fall. Protesilaus heroically sprang on to the sand, thus devoting his life for his country. So great was the distress of his wife, Laodamia, daughter of Acastus, that the gods gave her back her husband for three hours of life, and after that she joined him in the underworld.

The embassy sent by the Greeks to Priam to demand Helen's surrender was rejected, although Helen herself, foreseeing evil to come, was willing to return; and although Antenor, brother of Hecuba, urged the Trojans not to risk certain destruction at the hands of the army now assembled before their gates, an army which outnumbered their own as ten to one.

The war therefore began. The Trojan army was led by Hector, Priam's eldest son, a mighty hero, dear to Apollo, who watched over and defended him. Priam himself, now in extreme old age, left the army to his sons and their brave allies, led by heroes such as Aeneas, Glaucus, and Sarpedon. Yet there were many in the citadel who looked askance on Helen, and hated her for all the trouble she had caused and was to cause in the future, and she, seeing their dark looks, and weary of Paris, who seemed to her weak and cowardly when she compared him to Menelaus and his brother, was often fain to return to Sparta. Priam alone did not blame her for all the evils of the war. The war, he saw, came about not by her sin solely, but by the will of the gods; and gods took part in it. Aphrodite stood on the Trojan side for the sake of Paris, whom she loved. Apollo guarded Hector, and fought against the Greeks,

because of his deep anger against the house of Atreus. Against them there stood Hera, Athene, and Poseidon, protectors and helpers of the invading Achaeans.

Although the Trojans were much fewer in number than the Greeks, their city was built round with high and powerful walls, so that the besiegers could not come nigh them. From these walls a few men could keep a host at bay, or, if they made a sally, they could swiftly retreat behind them and thus be out of all danger. However often the Greeks might succeed in tempting the besieged to come out into the open field, they never stayed the fortune of a pitched battle, but betook themselves again to their walls, as soon as the fortune of war appeared to be going against them. Moreover, while Troy was well supplied with food and materials of war, and able to get supplies as usual from the merchants, who brought their goods across the promontory under the very walls of the town, in order to avoid the stormy sea passage round it, the Greeks had to forage all over the country and make expeditions, both by land and sea, in search of food. In all these expeditions Achilles was their principal leader. Him the Trojans dreaded above all the other Achaeans. Under his leadership eleven inland and twelve sea-coast towns were destroyed, and the country round Troy was ravaged from end to end.

Still, the years went on and Troy stood, seemingly impregnable. Nine years passed thus, and the tenth began. Many of the Greeks began to be weary, to long for their wives and homes, and to fear that when they did at last return to Greece they would find all things in confusion there. The soldiers complained that one woman was not worth all that they had to endure. Ten years had already gone by, and Troy stood as strong as ever.

CHAPTER X

THE TROJAN WAR. II

THE complaints of the soldiers at the endless campaign became loud and bitter when, at the beginning of the tenth year of the war a dreadful pestilence fell upon the host. First the mules and dogs perished, then the men sickened and died, until all along the Greek encampments the pyres of the dead burned continually. On the tenth day from the outbreak of the plague Agamemnon summoned an assembly of the host, and in their presence called on the soothsayers and interpreters of dreams—since dreams too came from Zeus—and asked them why the hand of a god was so heavy on the Achaeans. Then Calchas rose and said that Apollo was wasting the host with shafts of fell disease, shot from his silver bow, because of the despite which Agamemnon had done to his priest. A short time before Chryseis, a fair damsel, had been carried off from the sack of a Trojan townlet by the king, who kept her as a slave in his tent. Although her father Chryses came in the garb of a priest of Apollo, with his sacred staff in his hand and the fillet that marked his office on his head, and offered to pay a rich ransom, if the king would restore him his daughter, Agamemnon had driven him away with scorn, paying no heed to the staff and fillet of the god.

When Calchas had spoken, Achilles rose and urged Agamemnon to give up the maiden, and save the host from the disease that wasted them away. Then Agamemnon was very wroth, declaring that Chryseis was become dear to him. If he were to give up his prize,

he said, then he must receive in exchange the prize allotted to some other hero. Thus, after Chryseis had been sent back in a black ship, with a hecatomb of fair oxen therein, and sacrifice had been duly done to Apollo throughout the host, and prayers made to him that the scourge of fever might be removed, Agamemnon addressed Achilles, and said that since Chryseis had been taken away from him he should go to the tent of Achilles and take from it the captive he had won when he took the town of Brisa, the fair-haired girl Briseis. He was the leader of the host, and his spoil might not thus lightly be taken from him, he said.

Then would Achilles have attacked him and prevented this, but the goddess Athene, who loved him dearly, appealed to him with a terrible light in her grey eyes, and she stayed his hand. Achilles obeyed; leaving the assembly he returned to where his own men were encamped. When the messengers came to take Briseis from his tent, he let her go, but at the same time he swore to Agamemnon that a day would come when longing for Achilles should come upon the sons of the Achaeans one and all, and that then Agamemnon should in no wise avail to save them, for all his grief, when multitudes fell dying before man-slaying Hector. When Briseis was gone, Achilles went down to the beach of the grey sea, and there he called upon his mother Thetis, and she came up to him and wept over the wrong that had been done her son, the more that she knew that no length of days was in store for him. At the same time she promised that Zeus would not give victory to the Achaeans until they called again on Achilles for help; meantime the Trojans should press them hard, even to their encampments, in his absence.

And so it came to pass. For Achilles withdrew to his tent, because of the wrong that had been done him,

although all the time his heart yearned for the battle. There he stayed with Patroclus, and his men sat idle by their fifty well-benched ships, or wandered hither and thither about the camp, or sported by the sea-shore with quoits and archery, while the horses, each beside his own chariot, stood idle, champing clover and parsley of the marsh.

Meantime the Trojans, much encouraged by the knowledge of the pestilence which ravaged the Greek host, now sallied forth from the citadel and offered battle. With a mighty clamour and shouting they came forth, and the Achaeans marched on to meet them, for a lying dream had come to Agamemnon from Zeus, bidding him lead his men out to the fray.

Then Helen left the great purple web that she was weaving in Priam's halls, and came and stood with her women on the battlements of Troy, to look down upon the hosts. As she looked, a tear fell from her eye, and as they saw her pass, the Trojan elders, who sat in the halls, said, one to another, though they hated her for the evil she had brought to pass, that it was small wonder that Trojans and Achaeans should for so long suffer grievous harms because of such a woman, for she was marvellously like in face to the immortal goddesses.

Meantime, at Hector's suggestion, the hosts agreed to a truce, while Paris and Menelaus fought a single combat, by the result of which they agreed to abide. If Paris conquered, Helen and her treasures should remain in Troy, while the Greeks sailed home again; if not, she should return to Menelaus, bringing her treasures with her.

So they fought, and Menelaus conquered. Paris lay upon the ground, and would have perished by the sword of Atreus' son. But Aphrodite saw her favourite fall, and in a cloud she swept down upon the field and carried

him off, leaving in Menelaus' hand only his empty helmet, while she bore him into Troy to Helen's chamber. Then did the Trojans violate the pact, for while Agamemnon claimed the victory for his brother, a Trojan named Pandarus shot at him with an arrow and wounded him, though not deeply; the skilful surgeon, Machaon, soon stanchd the flow of blood.

Then in right earnest the battle began. Among all the heroes none distinguished himself so much as Diomedes. Athene stood by his side, and kindled flame unwearied from his helmet and shield, and he slew many of the Trojan knights, and even wounded Aphrodite and Ares when they joined the battle disguised as Trojans. In one Trojan, however, he found a friend to whom his house was bound by old ties of hospitality, and they stayed their swords and clasped hands. This was Glaucus, grandson of Bellerophon. In years long past Oineus, father of Diomedes' sire Tydeus, had entertained Bellerophon in his hall and kept him twenty days.

So fatal was the valour of Diomedes, that Hector went into the citadel and bade his mother take the women to the temple of Athene and offer her fair sacrifices, that she might hold him back somewhat. Then he went to summon Paris to come out to the fight. Small love had he for him—indeed, he cried, 'Would that the earth forthwith might swallow him up. The Olympian fostered him to be a sore bane to the Trojans and to great-hearted Priam, and to Priam's sons. If I but saw him going down to the gates of death, then might I deem that my heart had forgotten its sorrow.' And Helen too reproached Paris, but he seemed to heed not at all the reproaches of his wife and his brother. Then Hector went up to his own house, and there he took farewell of his dear wife Andromache, and of his little

son. When Andromache begged him to stay within the town and guard it he shook his head; his own soul forbade him to be anywhere save in the forefront of the battle, although he knew within himself that the dark day was not far off when holy Troy should be laid low, with Priam and all its folk. So he left Andromache and went down into the field where the battle was still raging, and Paris ran after him. Then Hector challenged the best of the Achaeans to meet him in single combat. Had Achilles been there, he would have stood forth among them all; after him, far best of warriors was Ajax, son of Telamon. Then these two fought hard, but they were so well matched that when the sun sank neither had gained the victory over the other. They parted, Hector giving to Ajax his silver-studded sword, and Ajax to him his beauteous belt adorned with purple, in token of the esteem of each for a gallant foeman.

An armistice was concluded. Greeks and Trojans buried their dead, and the Greeks, upon the advice of Nestor, built a wall and trench round their encampments.

But Zeus had promised Thetis that for her son's sake he would give victory to the Trojans, until the wrongs done to Achilles had been made good. He therefore commanded the gods to take no part in the next day's battle, and gave the victory in it to the Trojans. Things went so ill, despite the valour of Diomedes, that Agamemnon's courage failed him, and he was ready to advise a retreat. Of this, however, the other heroes, with Diomedes at their head, refused to hear. Agamemnon might go, they would not. Then Nestor, the wisest counsellor of them all, and a man to whom all listened gladly on account of his age and great experience, advised that an embassy be sent to Achilles to persuade him with gifts of friendship and kindly words.

And Agamemnon admitted that Nestor spoke well. He himself deeply regretted his angry folly, for now he knew that worth many hosts is he whom Zeus honours in his heart, even as he now honoured Achilles.

Nestor and Odysseus, therefore, went to Achilles in his tent. He received them in all love and friendship, bidding Patroclus prepare a great bowl of strong wine and set rich meats before them. Then they told him that they were come from Agamemnon, who offered him much wealth and fair handmaidens, among them Briseis herself, and one of his own fair daughters to wife, bringing with her a fair dowry of seven well-peopled cities—all this should be his if he would but cease from wrath and give his aid to the Achaeans.

But Achilles refused. Death, he knew, waited for him before the walls of Troy, and his wrath was not yet abated. Not until Hector, Priam's son, came to the huts and ships of the Myrmidons, slaying the Argives and smirching the ships with fire, would he think of war. So Nestor and Odysseus returned sorrowfully to the host.

In the night Odysseus and Diomedes went forth to reconnoitre. They captured Dolon, a Trojan spy, and surprised Rhesus, the Thracian king, who was on his way with twelve chosen companions to help Priam. Diomedes and his men slew Rhesus and his comrades, while Odysseus took away his beauteous horses, swift as the wind, and white as snow. Thus he frustrated the prophecy which said that, if these horses were fed on Trojan fodder or drank of the water of the river Xanthus, which flowed before Troy, the town could not be taken.

In the morning battle was joined again. Hector and Aeneas led the Trojans, while Agamemnon himself marshalled the Achaean host, and performed great feats. Many heroes did he slay, and the Trojans, hard

pressed, were driven back to the gate in their wall called the Skaian. But as the day wore on the king of Mycenae was carried wounded from the field; an arrow, shot by Paris, injured Diomedes in the foot, so that he had to go into his tent to have it tended, and a Trojan spear was driven through the breast of Odysseus. Surrounded by the foe, he would assuredly that day have perished, had not Menelaus and Ajax heard his cry for help, and come up to his rescue. All over the fields the Achaeans, without Agamemnon, Diomedes, and Odysseus, were pressed hard, while Hector, encouraging his men with deed and loud war-cry, led them on until the Greeks, though fighting every inch, were forced to retire behind the walls of their own camp.

Then were there great rejoicings in the Trojan host, and Hector drew his men up in five battalions to attack the camp itself. The first division was led by Hector himself, the second by Paris and Agenor, the third by Helenus and Deiphobus, two of the sons of Priam; the fourth by Aeneas, whose mother was Aphrodite herself, his father Anchises. In Troy all men esteemed Aeneas as a goodly soldier and wise counsellor, save Priam, who loved him not at all, because of an oracle which foretold that, in days to come, Aeneas and a race descended from him should rule over the Trojans. The fifth battalion was composed of allies led by Sarpedon, son of Zeus himself, and Glaucus, grandson of Bellerophon. Then war and the din of war sounded about the well-built wall the Greeks had made, and the beams of the towers rang beneath the strokes of spears and battering-rams. The Achaeans fought nobly. The two Ajaxes were everywhere on the towers, arousing the courage of the defenders, while they were themselves ever in the thickest of the fight. Despite all that they and the other heroes could do, however, the will of Zeus

was against them. He had determined to give the greater renown that day to Hector, son of Priam.

Hector spurred his men on, till in one mass they rushed straight at the walls and swarmed up the turrets of the towers, with sharp spears in their hands. Hector himself lifted up a mighty stone that lay in front of the gates—a huge wedge-shaped block of rock—and cast it, with more than human strength, which Zeus gave to him, against the ponderous gates, held by crossbars, and fastened with a heavy bolt. The weight and impact of the stone broke the hinges and tore down the bar; it came crashing through and the doors fell. Then Hector leaped in, the first to leap within the wall, clad in shining wondrous mail, with two spears in his hand, and the Trojans swarmed after him through the gateway or overleaping the wall. They streamed into the Grecian camp, thinking that they would soon press through the tents and ships, till they reached the sea. But Poseidon, seeing that the Achaeans were sore pressed, came down among them and put new courage in their hearts. Ajax, son of Telamon, and the lesser Ajax, Teucros and brave Idomeneus, went hither and thither through the army and stirred the men to new courage. Inch by inch they fought, hero encountering hero in hand-to-hand fight, and the Greeks not only prevented the Trojans from coming further, they drove them back. High rose their hopes when Ajax, son of Telamon, lifting in his hands a mighty stone, dashed Hector to the ground with it. Then did the Achaeans trust that their fiercest enemy had perished, when they saw Hector carried from the field. Not so, however, had the gods willed it that Hector should meet his fate. Apollo breathed new life and strength into his limbs, and he returned to the battle, filled with the new ardour given to him by the god. Seeing him

reappear the Trojans were full of joy at the miracle, while the Achaeans were cast down. Apollo stood beside Hector, as he led his men in renewed charge against the close ranks of the Achaeans, and when the soldiers felt his gaze their hearts failed them, and their strength fled. Once more, therefore, the Trojans pressed on and drove the Greeks within their walls. Then Hector shouted to his men and bade them attack the ships and set them on fire. For gradually the Greeks were driven back to their ships; nor did all that Ajax could do for long avail to drive from the spirits of the Greeks the panic with which Apollo filled them. Nevertheless they kept their ranks, and Hector could not break them. Despair filled their hearts: they had no longer any hope of seeing again their dear wives and children, or their own homes and native land. Yet, since their minds were set on death, they were resolved to die hard and to resist to the last. Ajax moved up and down the ships, breathing rage and fury into all.

At last, however, Hector seized the stern of one of the black seafaring ships, that which had borne the ill-fated Protesilaus, long since perished, and taking hold of it, he let not go, but called to his men to bring fire speedily, for Zeus had given them the victory. Ajax, who for so long had held back the assailants, was growing faint; his shoulder was weary from holding up his shield, and the darts rang round his face and helm. So, at last, Hector cast fire upon the ship of Protesilaus.

But when Patroclus, the dear comrade of Achilles, saw how the Greeks were thus hard pressed, and how Hector, with the aid of Apollo, was driving them before them even to the ships, his heart was sorely grieved. Sorrowfully he came to Achilles and begged him, if he himself could not yet relent from his wrath, to let another, even Patroclus, lead forth his men and give

succour to the perishing Achaeans. To this Achilles consented. Patroclus put on the splendid armour of Achilles, which the gods had given of old to Peleus his father, for he knew well that if the Trojans took him for Achilles they would be filled with terror. So he put on corslet and helmet, and took the mighty shield, and cast round his shoulders the baldric which held the sword of bronze, but the ashen spear that Chiron had given to Peleus only Achilles himself could wield. Achilles then called out to his men, who rejoiced greatly, for they had long wearied for the fight, and chafed as they saw their comrades hard pressed. He drew them up in companies, and made prayers and poured libations to Zeus, begging him to let Patroclus drive back the Trojans and then return safe to him out of the fight. Patroclus set forth in the chariot drawn by swift steeds. Greatly did the Achaeans rejoice when they saw Patroclus approaching with the stalwart Myrmidons; but the Trojans were marvellously dismayed, for they feared Achilles beyond all the Greeks, so great were the harms he had wrought them in the first nine years of the war, slaying more men and destroying more cities than any other hero in all the host.

The fortune of the day was changed. The panic that had filled the Achaeans was now felt by the Trojans. Patroclus drove them before him, and pursued them as they fled, slaying great numbers, among them Sarpedon. Only after a fierce struggle, in which Apollo again helped the Trojans, did they rescue Sarpedon's corpse, so that they might bear it off and bury it with due rites. Then Patroclus pressed on, and pursued the Trojans further, beyond the camp and far from the ships, forgetting the hest of Achilles that he should return to him when he had saved the ships. Three times he charged, and thrice he slew nine men, but the

fourth time doom met him, for Apollo smote the helmet from his head, and Hector seized it, and shattered his spear, so that he was defenceless. And then Hector slew him, and stripped from him the armour of Achilles. As he died Patroclus prophesied to Hector that he had not long to live, for soon he should fall by the hand of Achilles.

Then round the dead body of Patroclus the fierce battle raged for long. Menelaus and Ajax defended it, and the Achaeans stood firm against the charges of the enemy, led by Hector and Aeneas, and still they fought on though the darkness covered the sky.

Meantime Achilles knew nothing of the death of his dear companion until at last, in the very stress of the fight, Menelaus sent Nestor's son, Antilochus, to him with the evil tidings that Patroclus was dead, and his body in the hands of the enemy. Then was Achilles overcome by bitter sorrow, for he loved Patroclus as his own soul, and it was he who had sent him forth to his death. At least, he swore, Patroclus should not lie unavenged. When Thetis heard her son's resolve she wept bitterly, for she knew that his dear life must pay the forfeit; nevertheless she bade him tarry only till the morning, when she would bring him new and glorious armour, worthy of a divine hero, which Hephaestus would make him at her request.

Meantime the Achaeans were ever harder pressed. Thrice did Hector seize the corpse of Patroclus to draw it away; thrice did the two Ajaxes beat him off. In the end he must have accomplished his purpose, had not Hera sent a messenger to Achilles to warn him of the instant danger to the body of his dear companion, and bid him go, even unarmed as he was, to the trenches, to terrify the Trojans and encourage the Achaeans by his shout. He obeyed, and Athene cast her aegis round

him—the shield with the Gorgon's head upon it. When his great voice rang out and they saw the divine fire blazing round his head, the Trojans gave way. Then the Achaeans drew Patroclus' body out of the stress of the fight, and bore it off upon a litter. The sun set, and for that day the battle ended.

At daybreak Achilles called the Achaeans to council, and there before them all he renounced his wrath, and was reconciled with Agamemnon. Then by Odysseus' advice the army was strengthened for the fight to come with meat and drink, while Achilles mourned over Patroclus.

Thetis had brought him glorious armour wrought by Hephaestus. In this he clothed him, taking the lance Chiron had given to Peleus, and set forth in the forefront of the battle-array, in his chariot drawn by the immortal steeds, Balius and Xanthus.

In this day's battle all the gods took part. Hera and Athene, Poseidon, Hermes, and Hephaestus stood with the Achaeans, and with the Trojans, Ares and Phoebus Apollo, Artemis, Leto, Scamander the river-god, and Aphrodite. Even with so many immortals in the field, however, Achilles was foremost in the fray, in the centre of the hottest contest, the mark for every Trojan spear and dart. Many did he slay, but everywhere he sought for Hector. Round him the slain lay in heaps, and he chased the Trojans before him till the walls of Troy were near. There before the Skaian gate stood Hector. Right up to the gates Achilles pursued Agenor, but there he vanished, for it was not Agenor Achilles had followed, but Apollo, in Agenor's form, and him he could not slay. When he espied Hector, however, his heart rejoiced, and he rushed upon him with a mighty shout. Priam, standing within the walls, saw him coming, and cried out to his son to retreat. In vain: Hector stood awaiting the onslaught of Achilles,

He came on, the bronze of his accoutrements flashing like the rising sun, his great plumes waving in the wind, and his spear upraised in his right hand. Suddenly, as he gazed, chill fear came upon Hector, and he turned in flight. Valiant was the flier, but far mightier the fleet pursuer in that race, of which the prize was Hector's very life, as well each knew. Thrice round the walls did Achilles pursue him, and gradually drew nearer and nearer, for none in the two hosts was so fleet of foot as Peleus' son. At last, at the third turn, Hector faced round, for the time had come, and he must either slay or be slain. As he came on Achilles drove at him with his tremendous spear, a well-aimed blow, for it pierced the one point left bare by the armour of bronze—the gullet, through which the current of Hector's life flowed. Right through Achilles drove the deadly point. Hector fell, dying, at his feet, and as he expired he cried aloud to Achilles, 'Not far off is the day when thou too shalt perish at the Skaian gate, O Achilles, at the hands of Paris and Phoebus Apollo.' With that his noble soul flew down to the house of Hades. Achilles feared not his own death: he knew he had no long time to live; when the gods willed he was ready, and would go gladly, since he had avenged Patroclus and slain Hector. He stooped down and stripped from the dead body the armour that had once been his own, armour that Hector had stripped from the corpse of Patroclus. Then he pierced the feet with thongs of ox-hide and bound him thus at the heels of his chariot. Leaping to his seat, he lashed his steeds to full gallop. They flew on, round the walls of Troy, dragging Hector's body behind them, so that the once fair head was grimed with dust, and the corpse stained with it. Bitter was the sorrow of Priam and Hecuba, and of the unhappy Andromache, when from the walls they beheld this grievous sight.

When the Achaeans had gone back to their camp, there to celebrate the funeral of Patroclus with all due honour of games and feasting, as Achilles had commanded, the sad father of Hector rose up and placed fair gifts upon a wagon, talents of gold and shining tripods, and garments of great price, and a goblet of exceeding beauty, that the men of Thrace had one time given to him. Taking these gifts, he set forth to go to the tent of Achilles, and entreat him to give up the body of noble Hector, that it might have honourable tending and burial rites. Hermes himself was sent by Zeus to lead the old man and guide his chariot through the sentry lines.

He found Achilles in his tent, sitting lost in thought and sorrow for the dear comrade, even Patroclus, whom he had lost. Priam came close up to him, unperceived by the others that were there, and clasped Achilles by the knees. When Achilles saw the old white head bent low before him, remembrance of his own dear father came into his heart, and he thought of the sorrow he himself now knew for his dead, and had pity on Priam. He ordered his people to wash and anoint the body of Hector and clothe it in the splendid garments Priam had brought for a ransom, and lay it fairly on a bier.

Then Achilles made sacrifice and set meat and drink before the old man, for he was weary. Priam marvelled to see how great Achilles was, and how goodly, for he was like a god to look upon. At daybreak, Achilles sent him forth with Hector's body, laid fairly on the splendid bier, and he proclaimed an armistice of eleven days, so that the Trojans might hold funeral games, and bury Hector with due honour.

On the twelfth day the war began again. Without Hector, the Trojans were hard pressed, and they called upon all the allies they could think of to help them.

Penthesilea, the far-famed queen of the Amazons, came. Podarces, the brother of Protesilaus, fell by her hand, but she herself was slain by Achilles. As he looked upon her dying face a keen pang smote the hero's heart. Love had not entered his stern young life, but he saw in Penthesilea's closing eyes some hint of what he might have felt. He restored her body to the Trojans, in order that she might be buried with due honour. Another ally, Memnon, king of the Ethiopians, likewise fell at the hand of Achilles. He was indeed the life and soul of the Greek attack, as he had been before he retired to his tent in indignation.

Nevertheless, the Trojans held out doggedly, and behind the impregnable walls of the city they were still strong. In the Achaean camp men began to remember all the prophecies that had been made about the ending of the war, for it seemed that it could only end by the will of the gods, and not through human efforts. The Delphic oracle had declared that the best of the Greeks would fall out among themselves before Troy could be taken. At a banquet given in honour of the gods a violent quarrel did arise between Ajax and Odysseus, because Odysseus declared that Troy would never be taken by valour only, but by craft. Ajax hotly denied this. Achilles agreed with Ajax, and determined to force an entrance into Troy. He led a heroic sally against the Skaian Gate. But the hour of his doom had struck. Apollo stood behind Paris on the walls and guided his hand; an arrow from his bow pierced Achilles in his one vulnerable spot—the heel. Gloriously fighting, he perished, by the end he had himself chosen. All day Greeks and Trojans fought around his body. At nightfall a great storm came on, and in the darkness his Myrmidons bore it safely to the camp. For seventeen days and nights the

Greeks mourned the mighty hero. Thetis and her sisters, the goddesses of the sea, came with the nine Muses, and mingled their tears and lamentations with those of the camp. After due sacrifices had been made to the gods, especially to Zeus and to Athene, the body was solemnly burnt, and the ashes placed in a golden urn made by Hephaestus, and given by Dionysus. With them were mingled the ashes of the two men who had been in life most near and dear to Achilles, Patroclus, and Nestor's son, Antilochus. Then the urn was buried in a mound that crowned the promontory of Sigeum. There Achilles was worshipped, and there he once appeared to Homer in the full blaze of his war panoply, so glorious that the poet was struck blind by the vision. Later it was believed that Thetis had snatched her son out of the flames of the funeral pyre and given him a new immortal existence on the island of Leuce, where, as the noblest and most nearly perfect of warriors, he was given as his wife Helen, the most beautiful of women.

When all the rites were over, Thetis offered the glorious arms that Hephaestus had made for her son as a prize to the hero who had done the greatest service before Troy. Many voices at once declared that of all the warriors Ajax was, after Achilles, the worthiest. Had not he sustained the Greeks when Diomedes, Odysseus, and Agamemnon were carried wounded from the field; had not he, with Ajax the less, covered Menelaus and Meriones, while they bore off the dead body of Patroclus? Only Odysseus contested the claims of Ajax. He declared that the arms should be assigned to himself, and when the Trojan captives were called upon they bore witness that more harm had been done to Troy in the ten years of the war by the cunning of Odysseus than the valour of Ajax. Had he not destroyed Rhesus and his steeds, Troy could never be taken.

So the judges decided, and the arms were assigned to Odysseus. Bitter then was the grief and wrath of Ajax at the slight thus put upon him ; so bitter indeed that in his rage he went mad. In his madness he mistook the flocks in the camp for the enemy, and rushing upon them with drawn sword, slaughtered great numbers of sheep. All day his madness held him, but when the cool of evening came on it passed away, and coming to his senses again he found himself surrounded by the heaped-up bodies of the animals he had slain. When he realized what had happened, he resolved to end a life which he felt to be doubly dishonoured, first by the slight put upon him, and second by his own madness. Going down to the shore of the sea, he fell upon his sword, the sword that Hector had given him after the combat between them. Where his blood fell upon the ground the purple lily sprang up, bearing on its petals markings which showed the first letters of his name—AI, AI. On the Rhoetian promontory a monument was erected to mark the spot where he had encamped before Troy.

Among the captives taken by Odysseus was Helenus, Priam's son, who had the gift of prophecy. Since he declared that Troy could not be taken without the arrows of Heracles, Odysseus and Diomedes sailed to Lemnos, where Philoctetes had been dragging out a miserable existence for ten years, suffering intolerable anguish from his poisoned wound. With some difficulty he was persuaded to come to Troy, where Machaon, the physician to the host, healed him. With one of his arrows he slew Paris. The citadel still held out, however, even after Odysseus and Diomedes succeeded in stealing the image of Athene from the temple. Then, however, the goddess put into Odysseus' mind a plan by which the town was at last captured. He discovered

in the army a man who possessed marvellous skill as a carpenter and builder, whom he ordered to construct a wooden horse of immense proportions. When it was ready, the bravest of the Greeks, with Odysseus at their head, got into the vast belly of the horse, and there concealed themselves. The camp was then broken up and burned. All those not in the horse embarked on board ship, and the fleet departed.

The Trojans, not aware that the ships had only sailed a little way, and then anchored behind Tenedos, believed that the Greeks had given up all hopes of capturing the city, and sailed home. They streamed out of Troy, found the encampments deserted, and no sign of the Greeks, save the monstrous horse, standing up huge in the centre of the plain. Laocoon, a priest of Apollo, urged them to destroy the horse. True, a rumour had got about (spread indeed by the Greeks themselves) that the army had left the horse as a gift to Athene, who was wroth against those who had stolen her image from the temple. Even so, Laocoon urged, the gifts of enemies were formidable, and he rushed at the horse and struck its wooden flank with his spear. Meantime, however, another party of Trojans had found a man left in the Greek camp : Sinon was his name, and he was a kinsman of Odysseus. He declared that Odysseus had grievously wronged him, and that he was so filled with hatred for the Greeks that he had remained behind in order to do them an injury. If the wooden horse were taken into Troy and set up in the citadel, the favour of Athene would be restored to Troy. While the Trojans still hesitated, two great serpents came suddenly out of the sea and made straight for Laocoon, as he was engaged in sacrificing a bull on the shore. In spite of his shrieks of terror, they enfolded him and his two sons in their deadly coils, and crushed all three horribly to

death. * Then the snakes passed into the temple of Pallas and disappeared.

The Trojans took this as a clear sign that the gods were displeased with Laocoon, and that Sinon was right; and they at once dragged off the horse. Finding the city gateway too small to let it through, they broke down a portion of the wall and so drew it up to the citadel as an offering to Athene. Full of joy, they spent the night in feasting and revelry.

Meantime, however, at the darkest hour, Sinon crept up to the horse and opened the door, concealed underneath it. Then he lit the fiery signal that told the fleet, which now lay close underneath the city, of the success of the plan. The heroes descended from the horse and opened the gates of the city, to let their comrades in.

The Trojans, taken utterly by surprise, could not order their forces or assemble together in any way. Many were slain by the hands of their own countrymen. Others rushed wildly hither and thither, not knowing where to turn or where to find their leaders. The darkness of the night increased all their difficulties, and the fitful light of the flames, leaping up here and there, showed fearful scenes of confusion and destruction.

The aged Priam was struck down on the steps of the temple by Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, who had come from Greece to avenge his father. He now slew Priam, after cutting down one of his sons before his eyes. Menelaus' first object was to find Helen; with Odysseus he broke into the house of Deiphobus, who had led the Trojans since the death of Hector, and whom Helen had married after Paris fell. Deiphobus himself was slain, and Menelaus then rushed through the chambers of the house, his reeking sword in his hand, in search of his guilty wife, on whom he meant at last to wreak due

vengeance. Suddenly Helen stood before him in all her radiant beauty. The ten years that had passed had wrought no change upon her; she was the same adorably lovely creature who had once made the joy of his house. At the sight of her Menelaus' sword dropped from his hand, and the long bitterness melted from his heart. Helen told him that she had long rued the madness which Aphrodite had sent upon her, and that her heart had been full of longing for him and for her home; the Trojans hated her, and always suspected her of plotting to betray them to the Greeks, to whom they knew she inclined. Menelaus could not slay her, he could not even be angry with her; he fell on his knees before her, and kissed her hands.

When morning broke, Troy was wholly in the hands of the Greeks. The Trojans utterly overpowered, their best men slain, could offer no resistance. Aeneas had escaped with his aged father on his shoulders, carrying his household gods, but of all the Trojan royal house there remained only Hecuba, the aged queen, Helenus and Cassandra, children of Priam, and Andromache, wife of Hector.

The victors plundered the city, and then destroyed it utterly, levelling its walls and buildings to the earth, so that there remained no trace of its ancient glory. All the inhabitants were put to the sword or carried into slavery. Hecuba was given to Odysseus as a slave, Cassandra to Agamemnon, Andromache to Neoptolemus.

Thereupon the victorious fleet set sail for Greece. Nestor, Diomedes, Philoctetes, and Idomeneus arrived safely, but Menelaus and Odysseus had to wander for many years before they reached their homes, and the curse brooding over the house of Atreus awaited Agamemnon in his own halls.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE OF ATREUS

JOYOUSLY did Agamemnon pace the deck of the good ship that bore him swiftly home to Mycenae, after the long years of all the hardships and pains of war, and glad was he in the thought that he should soon see his wife and children and his home. He paid no heed to the captive Cassandra when she cried aloud, in terrible tones that pierced the ear, that in that home an evil fate awaited him, even the fulfilment of the curse that lay upon his house and the punishment of his own ill deeds. To Cassandra, by far the fairest among Priam's daughters, Apollo, who loved her, had given the gift of prophecy; her keen eye could look into the seeds of time and foretell the future. But she had refused the god her own love in return for his, and Apollo laid a curse upon her that none should believe her prophesyings, even though she prophesied the truth. When she warned them, men laughed mockingly at her, and called her mad. In vain did she warn Priam and Hecuba that, unless Paris were slain at his birth, he would bring great misfortunes upon Troy; when he returned alive they forgot her warnings, and rejoiced. In vain did she warn the Trojans, when Helen came, that their city would be laid in the dust because of her. None listened to her words. In vain now did she cry to Agamemnon that, in the halls of Mycenae, towards which the swift ship bore them, she saw his death and her own, and the furies waiting to fulfil the curse that rested on the house of Atreus, on all the seed of Pelops.

It was the insolent pride of Tantalus, the father of Pelops, that had first brought the wrath of the gods upon him and all his descendants. Tantalus was himself a son of Zeus, and so beloved of all the dwellers in Olympus that he was allowed to take part in all their counsels and share their meals. Unhappily for him, however, these honours only made him the more arrogantly proud and insolent, and filled him with a self-esteem and contempt for others that amounted almost to madness. Thus, one day he bade the gods to a banquet, at which he set before them the body of his own son Pelops, whom he had slain and seethed. None of the immortals partook of the hideous dish, save Demeter. She was so sunk in grief for the loss of her daughter, Persephone, that she took no heed of what was set before her, and thus ate a morsel of the shoulder of Pelops.

For this crime Tantalus was fearfully punished. He was imprisoned in Hades, standing up to his chin in a water, which he could not reach, being bound in such a way that he could not bend his head and touch with his lips the liquid for which he thirsted; above his head the finest and most luscious fruits hung in abundance, just out of his reach. There he suffered incessant intolerable agonies of hunger and thirst, mocked by plenteous food and drink around him. To complete his misery, a vast rock was suspended above his head, which threatened to fall at each moment.

While the father was thus punished, Zeus commanded Hermes to put the mangled limbs of the son back into the cauldron in which they had been seethed. Clotho, the fate who spins the thread of human life, drew Pelops forth again, restored to beauteous life. Demeter replaced the missing shoulder by one of ivory, and ever

afterwards the Pelopids were known by the white mark that they all bore on one shoulder. But the children, unhappily, inherited some share of the overweening insolence that had brought their father to his horrible downfall. Niobe, the daughter, was married to Amphion, king of Thebes, to whom she bore twelve fair children. In her pride she boasted of them, and compared herself with the fair-haired goddess Leto, who was the mother of but two children, whereas Niobe had twelve. Then Leto's two children, Apollo and Artemis, rose up in indignation against the mortal who had dared to boast herself greater than their goddess mother, and slew Niobe's twelve sons and daughters. Apollo slew the sons with arrows from his silver bow, and Artemis the daughters. For nine days they lay unburied, until the gods took pity and buried them; Niobe herself wept so bitterly and unceasingly that she was turned to stone, and stood in stone for ever after, among the lonely hills of Sipylus, where the tragedy had taken place.

Pelops meantime grew to manhood, and set forth to Elis to woo Hippodameia, the daughter of King Oenomaus. Now an oracle had told Oenomaus that he must die when his daughter married. He therefore compelled every one who came to sue for the hand of Hippodameia to contend with him in a chariot race from Pisa, the chief town of Elis, to the altar of Poseidon, which stood on the Isthmus. Oenomaus possessed horses which Ares had given him, swift as the wind, and Myrtilus, his charioteer, was a son of the fleet-footed god Hermes. As Pelops knew, thirteen suitors had already lost their lives for Hippodameia's sake. No ordinary horses could contend with the steeds of Oenomaus, and when he overtook a competitor in the race he would turn

round and transfix him with his spear. Pelops saw that he could only defeat the king by guile. He therefore went to Myrtilus and promised to give him half of the kingdom of Elis, if he would take out the linch-pins from the wheels of Oenomaus' chariot, and fill the axles with clogging wax, so that the wheels would not go round. Myrtilus agreed. Thus as soon as they started the king's chariot turned over: Oenomaus himself was thrown out and killed upon the spot. Pelops won Hippodameia and with her the kingdom. But when Myrtilus came to him to claim the promised reward, Pelops hurled the charioteer into the sea. As he fell, Myrtilus cursed Pelops, and called down the wrath of his father Hermes upon him and all his race.

Nevertheless things went well with Pelops, at first. He conquered Arcadia and spread his rule over so large a part of Greece that all the southern region was called after him, the Peloponnese. Olympia too came under his sway, and he restored the Olympic games with much splendour. For this his memory was ever held high in Greece. As his children grew up, however, the curse of Myrtilus began to work. Atreus and Thyestes, his two sons by Hippodameia, were jealous of their step-brother, Chrysippus, because they knew that their father loved him most. With the knowledge of their mother, who also hated Chrysippus, because he was preferred to her sons, they slew him, and cast his body into a well. Pelops discovered the crime, and banished Atreus and Thyestes. Hippodameia followed them in their flight, and they took refuge with Sthenelus, son of Perseus and Andromeda, who ruled in Mycenae, with their sister as his queen. Sthenelus gave them part of Argolis to live in; and after his death and the death of his son, Atreus, the elder of the Pelopids, obtained the

lordship over Mycenae, and refused to share it with his brother. But his own wife betrayed Atreus, and helped Thyestes to drive him out and reign in Mycenae in his stead. Then did Zeus in displeasure turn the sun and moon back in their courses, so that all might see how right and wrong had been confounded in the land.

Atreus soon gathered an army, with which he invaded Mycenae, recovered the kingdom, and drove Thyestes into exile in his turn. There Thyestes plotted revenge. He had adopted Pleisthenes, a son of Atreus, as a very small child, and brought him up as his own, so that Pleisthenes had no idea that Atreus was his father, and knew nothing of him save the lying tales Thyestes poured into his ears. When the young man grew to manhood, Thyestes dispatched him to Mycenae, under a solemn oath to murder the king, whom he believed to be a being of monstrous wickedness. Atreus slew Pleisthenes, before he could accomplish his purpose, then, discovering the would-be assassin to be his own son, he was filled with remorse. The feud between the brothers continued, for the curse lay heavy on the guilty house. Barrenness and famine visited the land—a sign of the anger of the gods at the unnatural strife between brothers. Finally, after many horrors, Thyestes and his son Aegisthus slew Atreus, and took possession of Mycenae. The sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaus, fled to Tyndareus, king of Sparta, who harboured them kindly, and treated them with the greatest honour and courtesy. At last Agamemnon collected a great army, with which he invaded the kingdom. Thyestes was defeated and slain. His son, Aegisthus, entered into a bond of amity with Agamemnon, though in his heart he longed for revenge, and meant to have it.

His opportunity came when Agamemnon sailed for

Troy and left his wife Clytemnaestra as guardian of the kingdom and of their children, Electra, Iphigenia, Chrysothemis, and Orestes. Year after year passed by: no news came: Agamemnon did not return. Aegisthus took advantage of the queen's loneliness to make love to her. With masterly cunning he turned her heart against her absent husband by talking continually of the sacrifice of Iphigenia; how the queen had been deceived into sending her little daughter to Aulis, as if to be betrothed to Achilles, but really only in order to meet a dreadful doom. Long before Agamemnon returned, Clytemnaestra's love for him had turned to hate, and she was false to her husband in his own house.

When the news came that he had set sail from Troy, the guilty pair plotted to murder him on his return. When the ship anchored, and Agamemnon landed, bringing the rich spoil he had won, and the many captives he had taken in Troy, among them the hapless Cassandra, his faithless queen received him with every sign of excessive joy in his home-coming. She told him of her misery and loneliness in his long absence, of her glory in his triumphant return, and cast at his feet a magnificent purple carpet, on which to step into his own halls once more. There, she said, a fair bath was prepared for his refreshment, and a superb banquet spread for him. When she heard this, Cassandra uttered a terrible cry, and shrieked out that she heard the rushing of wings and the hissing of snakes, as the Erinyes, the dread goddesses of retribution, gathered to exact their vengeance on the doomed house. The hideous history of the family of Tantalus rose before her, and she saw new horrors yet to come: a wife murdering her husband, and a son his mother. The gift of prophecy, which Apollo had lent her, stirred awfully within

her. She saw Agamemnon's death and her own too, and beyond that, the rising figure of the avenger, now indeed a mere child, but destined in the years to come to punish these horrors, and in so doing to bring upon himself a direful fate.

Agamemnon had passed in, heeding her not. The hour of death had struck for him. Blithely he went into the house with all his train. But as he stepped into the white marble bath, glad to taste ease and repose after the heavy toils of so many years of strenuous war, Clytemnaestra stood behind him and cast a murderous fishing net over his head. In its coils he was trapped. Twice Clytemnaestra smote him ; twice he shrieked and sank down on the ground. As he lay there, she struck the final blow ; blood from the mortal wound spurted up on to her garments, and so the hero perished. Exulting, Clytemnaestra looked down upon him, as he lay bathed in gore, and cried that the deed was well done ; Iphigenia was avenged, and Agamemnon had now drained off, in his own house, the bowl which he had filled with crimes and curses. Then, with the help of Aegisthus, she slew the hapless Cassandra. The child Orestes would have shared the same fate at Aegisthus' hands, but his sister Electra saved him ; he escaped from the palace with a trusty slave.

Meantime the murderers rejoiced in their deed. Aegisthus and Clytemnaestra were proclaimed king and queen in Mycenae, and their marriage was celebrated with much pomp. The people might look askance, but without a leader they were helpless. They could only say to one another, 'At least Orestes lives : one day he will return to avenge his father's murder.' The boy—he was but twelve years old—was conveyed safely by his servant to the protection

of his uncle, King Strophius, who ruled near the slopes of Mount Parnassus. Strophius' queen was Agamemnon's sister, and his little son Pylades was almost exactly of the same age as Orestes. With him Strophius brought Orestes up, exactly as if he were his own son, and the two boys were inseparable and devoted companions. The friendship between them grew with their growth; they did everything together, and had but one mind in all they did. Patroclus was not more dear to Achilles than Pylades to Orestes.

So Orestes grew to manhood, knowing nothing of what had happened in Mycenae. When he had reached his twentieth year, Apollo appeared to him and recounted all the story of his house, and of his father's horrible death. Orestes listened, appalled. Then the god proclaimed to him the awful duty that now lay before him: he must avenge his father, whose soul was crying out in Hades and could find no rest in death, until his murder was avenged. To satisfy Agamemnon's angry ghost his son must do a hideous act, one that would bring upon him frightful pangs, from which even Apollo's protection could not save him. He must slay his own mother, Clytemnaestra, who had done the deed of blood, even though in his turn he drew down upon his own devoted head the curse of the shedders of kindred blood, the curse that rested on the house of Atreus.

Orestes bowed his head when he heard Apollo's behest, and he solemnly devoted his life to avenging the murder of his father. Without any delay he set out for Mycenae, accompanied by the faithful Pylades, to whom alone he told his direful story. In the guise of travellers they arrived at the palace. Orestes went at once to Agamemnon's tomb to say a prayer and make

sacrifice there; on the tomb he laid a lock of his own hair as an offering. None came to that tomb, into which Clytemnaestra had thrust her husband's mangled and mutilated body, without the due rites of the dead, save the faithful Electra. She alone tended and guarded it. The maiden's life in the palace had indeed been a wretched one since her father's death. A helpless hatred of her mother's crime had filled her young heart with awful gnawing bitterness. She was utterly alone. Save in the halls of Clytemnaestra and Aegisthus she had no home, and to live there was agony to her. She longed for vengeance, but it was altogether outside her power. All her hopes were set upon Orestes, but she had no means of gaining news of him, and sometimes she dreaded that he might grow up, knowing nothing of the death of his father, or of the duty which lay upon him, as the sole son of the murdered king.

On this day, however, she came to Agamemnon's tomb with a strange offering—an offering from Clytemnaestra. In the night the queen had dreamed a fearful dream. It seemed to her that a serpent came out of Agamemnon's grave, fastened its fangs upon her and drew forth blood. When she awoke she was so struck with terror that she dispatched Electra with a belated offering to the tomb.

There Electra found the severed lock of hair. At the sight of it her heart beat fast. A wild hope entered her mind. Finding the two strangers in the grove, she asked the one who seemed to be the leader certain questions, and from his answers all was clear. Brother and sister, parted during eight years, were clasped in each other's arms. But their joy in reunion was brief. This was no time for joy. A stern task lay before them. As Electra went over again all the cruel tale of their

father's murder, Orestes nerved himself for his awful duty. Terrible and repulsive it was to him, but Apollo's commands had been stern. Electra knew no hesitation. Rightful vengeance must be done. The people of Mycenae would be on their side: there was no danger there. Aegisthus and Clytemnaestra were detested in the land. The only difficulty was to obtain an entrance to the palace, and that they might effect by claiming the hospitality due to strangers, and pretending to be two travellers from Parnassus or some distant part of Greece.

Everything succeeded. That very night Orestes did the awful deed. In vain did Clytemnaestra appeal to her son for mercy; in a terrible voice he told her that he was doing as the gods commanded; his father's angry ghost could not rest until his murder was avenged. She who had slain her husband must die at the hands of his son. The curse of their house was the evil in themselves: doom was come upon her for her false and cruel soul.

So when morning broke, Aegisthus and Clytemnaestra lay dead. All the people of Mycenae rejoiced. But Orestes had hardly struck the fatal blow which destroyed his mother when the cloud of madness began to gather over his spirit. His ears were filled with the sound of rustling wings and hissing snakes, and close beside him he felt the awful presence of the Erinyes, the more appalling that no one but himself could see them or feel the terrible blight that breathed from them. As he met their Gorgon eyes fixed upon him, invisible to all others, he felt his brain reel.

Wildly he fled from Mycenae to Delphi. There in the temple of Apollo he performed the sacred rites and ceremonies by which he hoped to purify himself of his

guilt and escape from the Furies. Even the aid of Apollo, however, could not avail to drive them from him. Everywhere, waking or sleeping, their terrible forms accompanied him. In the darkness of night he felt their eyes upon him; in the daytime the sound of their awful voices rang in his ears so that he could hear nothing else. It was as though his own agonies of remorse had taken this awful haunting form.

Apollo, who had commanded him to do the deed, could not purify him. He told Orestes that the only way in which he could obtain release was by the judgment of the Areopagus, the ancient, holy tribunal of Athens, which held its sittings on the hill of Ares. First he must appeal to Athene, and then she would summon the Areopagus to decide his case. So Orestes did. Athene received his supplication graciously, and the court met. The Erinyes accused Orestes of the murder of his mother, a crime against the most holy order, against his own blood. Apollo, on the other side, pleaded that though Orestes had slain his mother he had done so to avenge his father. Clytemnaestra had sinned against her husband, who was nearer to her than any other being on the earth; and again, fatherhood, he declared, was a closer bond than motherhood. Every one had a father, but there was one glorious goddess who had no mother, Athene herself, who had sprung full armed from the head of Zeus.

Athene herself agreed with Apollo, and when the twelve jurors of the Areopagus cast six of their votes for and six against Orestes, she gave her casting vote, as president, in his favour. He was therefore declared acquitted, and henceforth free of the awful presence of the Erinyes.

CHAPTER XII

THE WANDERINGS OF ODYSSEUS

WHEN Odysseus set sail with his men from Troy, the voyage which lay before him was longer than that which any other of the heroes had to accomplish. The rugged little island of Ithaca lay remote on the western coast of Greece, separated by a perilous sea-crossing from the mainland. Nevertheless, when the hero embarked, he little thought that ten weary years lay between him and his longed-for home-coming; years of toil and suffering, in which his brave heart often failed him, and he thought that he should never again see his home, or his wife Penelope, or Telemachus, the son whom he had left an infant in his mother's arms.

When he embarked, the wind carried him over to the Thracian coast, and there his men sacked the city of the Cicones, and slew the people of the town. But while the Greeks were plundering and feasting, the Cicones gathered an army from the inland parts, and came down in battle array to attack the Achaeans. All day they fought, and in the evening Odysseus and his men had to take refuge in their ships. When they set sail, a wild north wind arose, before which the ships were driven headlong and their sails torn to shreds by its might. The force of it swept them on for two days and two nights, and when they reached Cape Malea and tried to double the point, they were driven out of their course: instead of turning and making to the north again, which would have brought them safe to wooded Ithaca, they were carried far to the south. For nine

whole days the ruinous wind bore them over the deep. On the tenth they ran ashore on an unknown land, further south than any explorer had yet ever come. There dwelt the Lotus-eaters. They did not seek to slay the men Odysseus sent ashore, but instead gave them the flower of the lotus to eat. So strangely delicious was this honey-sweet flower, that those who tasted it lost all desire to go away from the island. The waves dashing on the shore sounded far away: the voices of their fellows became dim and distant: the homeward way was forgotten: and their one longing was to dream on for ever, with half-shut eyes, lying on the soft beds of thyme and heather, resting for ever from labour and pain. Odysseus had to drag his men back to the ships against their will, weeping, and bind them forcibly to the benches; and then he bade the others fall to their oars and sail on with all speed, for those who had tasted of the lotus would have returned if they could.* Now they were many miles out of their course, on a sea they knew not at all, so they rowed on and on until, after many days, they again came near to land. On a dark misty night they ran ashore on a low wooded island, with a long sandy beach, that lay across the harbour of the land where the Cyclopes dwelt. On the beach they slept that night, and the next day they feasted. Then, in the early morning, Odysseus set forth with the men of his own ship's company, to find out what manner of men they were that dwelt on the mainland. When they reached it, they espied a cave on a strip of beach facing the sea, lofty and roofed over with laurels. Evidently it was the home of some solitary being. Odysseus filled a goatskin with wonderful wine that one of Apollo's priests had given him, and taking twelve companions, entered the cave. There he found lambs and kids in great numbers standing in pairs; and great cheeses

and bowls of milk ranged all around. Although his comrades counselled him to take of the cheeses and animals and flee to the ships, Odysseus desired to see who the dweller in the cave himself might be. So they kindled a fire and made burnt offering, and after eating they sat and waited.

At last the owner came. He was a giant, whose huge form, vast as a wooded peak of the towering hills, darkened the cave as he came in, carrying a great weight of dry wood, and driving his flocks before him, all save the rams and he-goats, which he left in the yard. When he had come in he lifted a mighty rock, so big that two-and-twenty good four-wheeled wains could not raise it from the ground, and closed the mouth of the cave, in such manner that no one could pass in or out. When they saw this, the hearts of Odysseus and his companions sank within them, for their way of escape was cut off : they were shut in with a fearsome giant. He was a Cyclops, with but one terrible eye, set in the middle of his huge forehead. When his eye lighted upon them, in the semi-darkness of the cave, he asked them, in a voice like rolling thunder, who they were. Odysseus replied that they were followers of Agamemnon, who came to him asking, in the name of Zeus the All-father, for the hospitality due to strangers. Thereat the monster laughed, replying that he recked not of Zeus. With his immense hand he seized two of the Greeks, dashed their brains out upon the floor of the cave, and tore their limbs in pieces for his supper, while the others looked on with sickening horror. After he had had his fill of human flesh and milk from the cows, the Cyclops stretched himself among his sheep and slept.

In the early morning he arose and lightly moved the great door-stone aside to drive forth his fat flocks, setting it in its place again after he had gone forth.

Odysseus sat silent in the cave pondering how he and his men were to escape from the terrible pass in which they found themselves. At last, after praying to Athene, a scheme came to him. From a great club, as huge as the mast of a big ship, which Polyphemus—such was the name of the Cyclops—had left in the cave, he cut off the narrow end, about a fathom's length, sharpened it to a point, and hardened it in the fire.

When evening fell the Cyclops returned, and this time he drove all his flocks inside the cave. When he had done that, he seized two more of Odysseus' men, slew them as before, and cut them up for his supper. As he prepared to eat, Odysseus came near him and offered him a bowl of the rich, dark wine he had brought. The Cyclops drank and drank again of the strong wine, and when the intoxication of it was spreading through his brain, he asked Odysseus his name, and said he would give him a gift in return for the rare liquor.

'No-man is my name,' said the crafty Odysseus. 'No-man all my fellows call me.'

Then said the Cyclops, 'I will eat No-man last: that is my gift.' With that he laid him down and sleep overcame him.

As he lay there, spread out in all his horrid length, Odysseus made the stake he had prepared red hot in the fire. With the help of four among his companions, he drove it hard into the single eye in the middle of the monster's forehead, and, while they pressed it in and held it in place, he turned it round and round like a drill.

Polyphemus awoke and uttered an appalling yell, so loud and piercing that the rocks rang with it. Madened with pain he tore out the brand, and cried aloud to all his fellow Cyclopes who dwelt in the caves around. And they heard and came to the door of the cave crying:

'Surely no man dares to injure thee, Polyphemus?'

Then Polyphemus replied in his agony, 'No—man doth injure me, No—man is slaying me by guile. . . .'

With that, thinking that their kinsman was alone, the others departed, bidding him pray to his father Poseidon for relief in his sickness.

Then the Cyclops, blind and groaning in pain, moved the stone from the opening of the cave, and sat there with outstretched hands, so as to catch any one who might try to escape. But the cunning Odysseus bethought him of a plan by which to outwit Polyphemus. Snatching up a handful of the rushes that had made the Cyclops' bed, he used them to tie three of the fat sheep together. Then he fastened one of his men beneath the woolly body of the middle sheep of the three, and so he did with each of them, till there was but one sheep left. This was a splendid young ram, with long fleecy hair, the goodliest of all the flock. Odysseus himself lay curled beneath his shaggy belly, where he hung, clasping tight hold of the wondrous fleece. As soon as dawn appeared in the sky, the rams hastened forth to their pastures. As each passed out, Polyphemus, sitting at the entrance to the cave, passed his hand along their backs. The hearts of the Achaeans beat wildly, but he let the sheep pass through, never guessing the burden that they bore, even although he held the ram, beneath which Odysseus hung, long under his hand, speaking to him and stroking him, for he was his favourite in all the flocks.

Once they were clear of the cave and the yard outside it, Odysseus dropped down and released his comrades. Then they drove the fat sheep before them, and made their way with all speed to where their ship lay anchored. There they stowed the sheep on board, and without daring to delay even to shed a tear for the

dear and ill-starred comrades they had lost, the men bent their oars with a will. While they were still within earshot of the cave, Odysseus raised his voice and cried tauntingly to the Cyclops. Polyphemus heard him, and broke off the peak of a great hill, which he threw into the sea so that it fell right in front of the ship. The sea heaved and the water rushed backwards, so that the ship was driven back and sucked up on to the beach, where it would have grounded, but that Odysseus pushed it off with a long pole. The men dashed in with their oars, and pulling with might and main drew out to sea again. In spite of their expostulations, Odysseus could not be restrained from once more taunting Polyphemus. He cried out to him that if any asked him how he lost his eye, he should say that it was Odysseus, Laertes' son, who dwelt in Ithaca, that did it.

Alas, the pride of Odysseus swiftly brought its punishment, for the giant stretched out his mighty arms to the starry heavens, and cried aloud to Poseidon, his father, to hear him and grant that Odysseus, Laertes' son, might never come to his home, or if he did that he might come late, in evil case, with the loss of all his company, in the ship of strangers, and find sorrows in his house.

Poseidon heard the prayer of Polyphemus. Grievous suffering came upon Odysseus, so that he might call himself the unhappiest of men. He lost all his ships and all his dear companions, and spent ten years in wandering over the pathless sea. And his home was devoured by strangers, who persecuted his dear wife.

Meantime, however, not knowing the ills in store for him, he rejoiced in his escape. Polyphemus cast another mountain after him, even greater than the first, but it fell behind the ship, and drove it forward. At the island they found the other eleven ships, and during

the night they feasted and ate the rich flesh of the sheep. In the morning they set sail once more. Where they were they knew not, but the wind bore them on, and before long they came to the floating island, where Aeolus, the keeper of the winds, dwelt with his twelve children. His palace filled all the island, and all around it, on top of the sheer cliffs above the sea, ran a wall of unbroken bronze. Aeolus received Odysseus kindly, and entertained him and his company for a whole month. When they set sail again, he made the west wind blow for them, which carried them direct upon their way. To Odysseus he gave a leathern wallet, in which the other winds were tightly imprisoned. This he fastened in the hold with a silver thong, so that no unfriendly breeze might escape to divert them from their true course to Ithaca.

So after nine days of smooth sailing Ithaca came in sight. As Odysseus stood at the helm a weariness came over him: he felt that his toils were over and he might rest, and he slept at his post.

Then his men began to whisper together and ask one another what the wallet contained; some thought that Aeolus had given Odysseus gold and silver to take home, while they would arrive empty-handed; and all were full of curiosity. Ill counsels prevailed: they opened the wallet. At once the winds burst forth, a violent blast seized the vessel, turned it round and drove it hard away from Ithaca, back to the place from which it had come. When Odysseus awoke, he was near to jumping overboard, but his men, tardily sorry for what they had done, restrained him. The storm did not abate for ten days, and then the island of Aeolus was once more before the wretched crew. When Aeolus saw Odysseus again he would not receive him: since he had returned, he must be hateful to the gods.

For six days more they rowed on, driven this way or that by the heavy storm, and on the seventh day landed at Lamos in the domain of a race of more than human size, called the Laestrygons, over whom Antiphates ruled. Antiphates slew one of the company in his halls, and prepared to devour him. When the others fled to the ship he called the war-cry, and from far and near the gigantic Laestrygons came flocking. First they cast down huge pieces of rocks which shattered many of the vessels there. They followed the Achaeans down to the ships and attacked them there. Those that fell were carried off for the horrible feasts of the islanders. Ever more and more of the Laestrygons came down to assist their comrades, so that the Greeks were far outnumbered. Odysseus cut the hawsers of his ship, and bade his oarsmen row; to the others he cried to do the same. But it was in vain. One ship alone—that which bore Odysseus and his company—escaped. The other eleven were lost with all their crews.

Odysseus sailed on sadly, grieving over the loss of his companions, and came to the Aeaeon island, where dwelt the enchantress Circe, whose father was Helios and her brother Aeetes. For two days they rested in the harbour, for they dreaded lest the witch-goddess should lay a spell upon them. Then Odysseus sent one half of his company, with Eurylochus at their head, to seek out the halls of polished stone, where the queen dwelt among the forest glades. All around them lions and wolves were roaming, and within the courts they could hear the voice of Circe singing her charms, as she wove a wondrous web. The beasts were all under her spell, and let the Greeks pass through, even fawning upon them and rubbing themselves against their legs in most uncanny fashion. Circe herself, hearing their

approach, came forward and bade them welcome. She set food before them on a high carved table, and after they had eaten mixed a sweet draught, in which she had put some harmful drug. After they had drunk, Eurylochus, who had tarried at the entrance, refraining from the feast, saw her smite them with her wand, and so, they were on the instant transformed into the outward appearance of so many swine. In that shape Circe penned them in a sty, and there flung acorns to them to eat. Eurylochus fled horror-stricken; he returned to Odysseus and told him what an evil doom had overtaken his men. Odysseus then went himself up to the palace. On the way, Hermes appeared to him with his golden wand, and told him what to do in Circe's hall. At the same time he gave him a plant of marvellous virtue, to protect him against her spells. Circe set Odysseus in a goodly carved chair, studded with silver, and made him a potion in a golden cup; but, thanks to the herb, he was not bewitched either by the drug or by her strange and awful beauty. Thereupon she smote him with her wand, thinking to turn him into a swine like the rest of his company, but Odysseus drew his sharp sword, as Hermes had bidden, and sprang upon her as if to slay her. Then Circe fell at his feet and swore that she would do him no more hurt, for now she recognized him as Odysseus, whose coming had been foretold her by the gods. After she had restored those whom she had bewitched to their natural shapes, she bade him bring the rest of his company. Fair baths and goodly raiment awaited them in the palace, and for a year they abode there, feasting on abundant meat and sweet wine, until the soldiers began to weary and long for their homes. Circe told Odysseus that before he could fare further on his way he must go down to the dwelling of Hades and

Persephone, and consult the spirit of Tiresias, the Theban soothsayer. Bitterly wept the Greeks when they heard this, but it was of no avail. Circe sent a fair north breeze; they embarked, and the ship came after many days to the stream Oceanus, at the limits of the world. In the starless realm of the Cimmerians they beached the ship, and then Odysseus passed through the tall poplars and willows of Persephone's grove. Then he dug a pit and made sacrifice with all due rites, filling the trench he had made with the dark blood of the slaughtered animals. To him there, in the gathering darkness of that mysterious spot, the spirits of the dead came up, visible to him alone, and he spoke with them. He saw Anticleia his mother, Agamemnon and Achilles, Antiope and Alcmene, Leda, the wife of Tyndareus, and Iphimedeia, the mother of Otus and Ephialtes, the two who had striven to climb up to Heaven by piling Ossa on Olympus and Pelion on Ossa, so that there might be a pathway to the sky. Therefore, Zeus had slain them in their early youth. Heracles, too, he saw, Theseus and Pirithous, Sisyphus and Tantalus in torment, Eriphyle, Jocasta, and Ariadne, and many more. At last Tiresias came, and told him of his further voyaging, and prophesied that all would go well with him so long as no hurt was done to the kine of Helios that pastured on the Thrinacian isle.

Swiftly after this did the ship speed back to Circe's isle. There the enchantress feasted them, and sent them forth, after she had well stored the vessel with meat and wine, and had given much good counsel to Odysseus. Chiefly she charged him, as Tiresias had already done, that he should do no hurt to the kine of Helios, for if they were injured there was ruin in store for his ship and for his men, and for himself a late returning in evil plight, with the loss of all his com-

pany. Also she told him how to get by the island where the Sirens dwelt, and past the monsters Scylla and Charybdis, who made the part of the sea where they dwelt fatal to mariners.

Then before a fair breeze they set sail again, and sailed on until they saw the island of the Sirens, a faint dark speck on the horizon. A sudden calm fell, the men reefed the sails and sat to their oars. Meantime Odysseus kneaded a great piece of wax and melted it in the sun. With the soft wax he filled the ears of his men, so that they might hear nothing, and then bade them fasten him straitly to the mast with ropes, bound hand and foot, in order that he might be unable to move, however much he strove, when he heard the Sirens' song. All this was by Circe's directions. The sailors did as Odysseus bade them, and sitting down to the oars pulled at them hard. Soon Odysseus heard the ravishing song of the Sirens, floating towards him on the breeze, and as they drew nearer, the strain became more and more enchanting. No man could, of his free will, resist the sweet sound of the voices of these strange beings, half woman and half bird, as they called to him to come and dwell with them, who could teach him things only known to the gods, the hidden mysteries of life. In a fair flowery mead they lay, surrounded by the deep blue sea, but among the flowers there lay the scattered bones of men, bleaching miserably in the sun, men who had listened to their song and perished. Yet their magic worked so strongly upon Odysseus that he longed to go to them, and made frantic signs to his men to let him free. Instead of that, they bound him yet more closely to the mast, and rowed on with might and main until they had passed out of hearing of the sweet deceiving voices.

They had hardly left the island well behind them when

Odysseus saw, rising on his left, two great mountainous rocks of smooth, beetling stone, beneath which the waves roared furiously. These he knew to be the clashing Symplegades, through which no ship had ever passed safely save one—the Argo. On every other thing that strove to pass between them the cruel rocks closed with terrible force, crushing ship or winged thing. The sea for many miles around was strewn with fragments of timber, planks of ships, and bodies of hapless men.

On the right hand side he saw a smoke and a great wave, and heard the sea roaring. There beneath the hollow rock, Scylla, he knew, dwelt in a vast cave. She was a horrible monster, sunk to her middle in the cave, with six heads on long necks. As they rowed past she stretched out these direful heads and carried off six of Odysseus' men, as they sat bending over their oars. Odysseus saw them stretching out their hands to him in the death-struggle, as the monster devoured them, but he could not stay, though the sight was the most pitiful he had seen in all his travail. Instead, he had to cry to the others to row on, for he knew well that there lay yet another fearful peril before them. Hard by Scylla lay Charybdis. Beneath a low rock, on which a great fig-tree grew in fullest leaf, the monster lay, alternately sucking the black water in and spewing it out into her mighty whirlpool. All around the rocks there was a horrible roaring sound, and to the sky there rose incessantly a thick steam, that was frightful to behold. Rowing swiftly, however, they came safely by, since the water was still for the moment. These dangers once passed, they came before long to a lonely island, which Odysseus knew to be Thrinacia, since he could hear the lowing of cattle, the splendid herds of the sun-god which pastured there. Then Odysseus begged

his men to row past the island, and told them what Tiresias and Circe had prophesied, but they would not listen. Eurylochus declared that, although Odysseus might be made of iron, a man of superhuman strength, they were sick with weariness, and must rest at least for that night. In the morning, however, the south wind was blowing, and for a whole month it blew without ceasing, so that they were compelled to remain on the island. The men swore not to touch the kine, and so long as they had the corn and wine, with which Circe had stored the ship, they kept their word. But when their provision was consumed and hunger began to gnaw them, Eurylochus counselled them to slay the kine, while Odysseus slept. For six days they feasted on the best of the kine. On the seventh day the wind, that had kept them prisoned, died away, and they lifted anchor and sailed forth. Soon, however, the sky darkened, and the shrilling west wind arose with the rushing of a great tempest. The wind snapped the mast, so that it fell down, killing the pilot as it fell, and the ship reeled over, filled with sulphur from the lightning blast of angry Zeus. All the men were swept from the vessel into the roaring sea, where they perished to a man. Odysseus alone survived. He made a rude raft, by lashing keel and mast of the wrecked ship together; to this he clung desperately, and the wild waves bore him all through the night before a south-westerly wind, back to deadly Charybdis. There in the cold morning light he found himself, on the verge of the whirlpool. The raft was sucked down, but he clung, bat-like, to the stem of the fig-tree, and there he hung, though numb with fatigue and exposure and chilled to the bone, until, after many painful hours had passed, the raft appeared again on the surface of the eddying waters. Gladly he threw himself upon it and rowed

away with his hands. For nine days the wind drove him on, and the waves bore him up, and on the tenth night, exhausted and famished, he was washed ashore on the island of Ogygia, where the sea was violet-blue. Soft meadows bloomed all around, full of parsley and of violets, and in the woods of alder, poplar, and sweet-smelling cypress, all sorts of wild birds roosted—owls and falcons and chattering sea-crows. There in a great cave, about which a vine clambered, near to four sweet fountains, there dwelt a goddess, Calypso, of the fair-braided hair, daughter of Atlas, who bore the firmament on his shoulders. Calypso took Odysseus in, all weak and weary as he was, and cared for him, cherished him and gave him sustenance. She offered, because of her love for him, to make him ageless and deathless. Odysseus refused; his heart was weary within him always; he yearned for his own dear wife, Penelope, and all day he sat by the beach weeping bitterly, and longing for his own country. For eight years he abode with Calypso, and the day of his returning seemed to have perished utterly. But Athene had not forgotten him, though she had had to bow before the wrath of Poseidon on Polyphemus' account. Now she entreated Zeus to have mercy on Odysseus, who had suffered so much already. In answer to her prayer Zeus sent Hermes to Ogygia, to tell the nymph that the gods commanded her to set the hero on his way. Calypso obeyed; she sent Odysseus forth on a well-bound raft, clad him in imperishable raiment, gave him a plenteous store of bread and sweet wine, and set a warm and gentle breeze to blow. For seventeen days he sailed before the breeze, but when land hove in sight a storm arose, which shattered the raft. Two whole days did Odysseus swim, and at last the waves cast him, naked and buffeted, on the shore, near to the mouth of a river. Utterly wearied, he laid

him down to sleep among the bushes, and slept there until noon the next day. When he awoke he found himself in the midst of a lovely company of maidens, playing ball on the sand. Spread all around them upon the grass was the fair white linen which they had washed and laid out to dry. Terrified at the sight of a naked man, the maidens fled, all save one, the fairest of them all, who seemed to him like a goddess. She told him that she was Nausicaa, the daughter of the king of that land—Alcinous, lord of the Phaeacians. The gods loved the Phaeacians, and they dwelt in a far land, at the remotest limit of the world, famous for their seamanship and skill with the oar. Nausicaa gave Odysseus raiment and food. After he had bathed in the river and anointed himself with the oil she gave him, and put on fresh garments, he came to the palace of her father Alcinous. It was set in a superb garden, where the west wind, ever blowing, kept the trees in bloom and fruit throughout the year—pear-trees and pomegranates, apples, figs, olives, and the vine. The walls and floor of the palace were of beaten bronze, the doors of gold and the door-posts of silver—all marvellously carved. The hangings and coverlets were wrought by the famed skill of the Phaeacian women. Alcinous and his queen received him kindly, and promised to send him home to Ithaca in one of their ships. To them Odysseus told all the story of his wanderings, all that he had done and suffered in the nine years since he left Troy. When they heard it they were spellbound in the halls. Next evening, after the feast, Alcinous and his lords took tripods and carved cups of gold and silver, and fair raiment laid up in a polished coffer, and stored these gifts beneath the benches of a ship. On Odysseus they spread a soft rug and sheet of linen, and when the ship set sail a deep sweet sleep fell upon his eyelids, so that he did not

mark what course the vessel took. Still sleeping, the sailors lifted him out when they reached Ithaca, and laid him on the sand beneath an olive-tree, with all his gifts beside him.

There they left him. When Odysseus awoke, lo ! he was in his own dear land once more, after wellnigh twenty years' absence. Joyously did he fall down and kiss the earth. Even so, however, he too might, like Agamemnon, have returned to his own halls only to perish there, for although he knew it not, his house was full of arrogant men, wooers for the hand of Penelope, who had taken up their abode in his halls, and wasted his substance, feasting day and night. So the curse of Polyphemus was fulfilled ; late and alone, after bitter sorrows and the loss of all his dear companions, did Odysseus return to Ithaca and find his halls full of strangers, and his wife and son oppressed. Nothing of this would Odysseus have known, however, but that Athene, who ever loved him, now appeared to him in the guise of a shepherd. She told him how the island chiefs had for the past years been wooing Penelope, and vexing her son Telemachus, and there were none to protect them, for Laertes was very old. Penelope had put the urgent wooers off, by saying that she would not marry again until she had finished a certain garment she was weaving on her web. All day she wove at it, but the web grew not, for each night she unwove all she had woven during the day. The wooers, quartered in the house, were growing impatient and more insolent and overbearing daily ; their presence made life intolerable to Penelope and Telemachus. At last Telemachus, in despair, had, by Athene's advice, gone forth in search of his father. It was indeed high time for Odysseus to return, since Penelope, driven to extremity, and despairing of ever seeing her lord again, had at last promised

the wooers that she would wed the man who, on the feast-day of Apollo, should draw the bow of Odysseus and send the arrow through the hole in twelve axe-blades to be set up as marks in the hall. Athene bade Odysseus conceal his treasures. Then she disguised him as a beggar and took him to the hut of Eumæus, the old swineherd, where he stayed, none guessing who he was, until Telemachus returned. When the young man came back, sick at heart at the failure of his quest, Odysseus revealed himself to him, and the two then plotted together how they might slay the wooers and free Penelope. Still in disguise, Odysseus went into the city with Eumæus, and as he entered his own halls none knew him. Only his poor old blind dog, Argos, who lay neglected at the door, recognized his master, and fell dead at his feet with joy. As Odysseus went about among the wooers, begging, Antinous, the most arrogant of them all, struck him with his stool. In his disguise Penelope knew him not, even when she asked him for tidings of her dear lord, but Eurycleia, the old nurse, recognized him when she came to wash his feet, because of an old scar he bore on one of them. Yet she said no word, for Odysseus bade her be silent until the time should have come. Then at night, with the aid of Telemachus, he removed all the weapons from the hall, for the next day was Apollo's festival. There at the feast one of the comrades of Telemachus, a man gifted with second sight, got up and left the board, for he knew that doom hung over the company. He saw the shadow of the shroud of death lying over the bodies of the wooers, and on the walls the marks of dripping blood. They heeded not the warning, however. Odysseus bade Eumæus and the neat herd—who now knew him for himself—bar the outer doors, while Eurycleia fastened those which led out of the hall into the women's chambers.

The contest then began. Each in turn the wooers took the mighty bow and tried to draw it. In vain—not one of them could stretch the string. Then Odysseus, sitting at the table in his beggar's rags, seized the bow, strung it, and sent the arrow straight and true through all the axe-blades. All present stared at him, stunned and dumb with wonder. Not for long. He leapt on to the platform, and, drawing the bow again, sped the deadly arrows among the terrified wooers. Penned in and with no weapons, they could not escape. With the aid of Telemachus and Eumaeus, Odysseus slew them all, and all there of the household who had conspired with them.

Then Odysseus cast off his disguise, and Eurycleia brought Penelope down from her upper chamber. At first she knew him not, for in the long years he had greatly changed, but when he showed her certain tokens and described to her the bed which he had made for her when they were married, her heart melted. She knew her own dear lord, and fell weeping into his arms.

That night Odysseus rested, but on the morrow he subdued the Ithacans and people from the islands, who had come to avenge the deaths of their chiefs, the wooers. He set his house in order, so that all was as it had been before he sailed for Troy. Great was the joy he brought to the heart of his aged father Laertes, who had long mourned him as dead, and to Penelope, with whom the rest of his days were passed in peace and happiness.

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